Middlebury SPORTS MAGAZINE

FEBRUARY 2014

MORE THAN A FOOTBALL STORY PG. 20

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PHOTO BY ANTHEA VON VIRAGH

COVER PHOTO BY OLIVIA ALLEN

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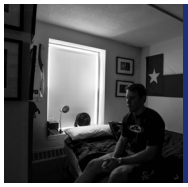
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PHOTOS BY PAUL GERARD

TO OUR READERS

When we decided to create *The Middlebury Sports Magazine* a year ago we would have been hard-pressed to imagine that it would evolve into what it has: a 40-page, artfully designed magazine containing stories about Middlebury athletics that you cannot read anywhere else. While the second iteration of *MSM* should be read with the first issue — released in May of 2013 — in mind, there is a distinctly different feel to this second issue. In the pages and stories that follow our goal was to delve beyond a celebration of the high level of athletics that undoubtedly exist here at Middlebury and critically examine the greater culture of athletics at the College. We hope that our investigation beyond the statistics and scores and into the academics, social life, players and coaches that drive Middlebury sports, can create a more complete picture of what it means to interact with athletics in all spheres of life on our small campus.

Choosing Division III — and a school like Middlebury, in particular — means that athletes must juggle their social lives, academics and demanding practice schedules, all while dealing with the stress of performing. Balancing these three main pillars of life at Middlebury is delicate and not uniformly shared among athletes and teams. Some teams seem to take on the role of fraternities on campus, providing a necessary social space for students. But what of their performance on the field and in the classroom? Is there a model of success for which all teams should strive? Does a "winning formula" for navigating these different circles exist?

These are some of the core questions that the editors and contributing writers of *MSM* posed across the College's athletic landscape, highlighting many of the people that foster a familial atmosphere at the fieldhouse, while simultaneously building Middlebury into an athletic powerhouse in the Division III ranks. These questions also led us to take a closer examination of some of the issues that remain less visible and less discussed in these forums. Should sports teams play a vital role in the social life at Middlebury? Does the College need a better system of checks and balances in its evaluation of teams' academic performance? How does Middlebury care for those students — varsity athlete or not — struggling with highly debilitating, but largely invisible, injuries? Our goal isn't so much to provide answers to these questions as to pose these questions to you, our readers — Middlebury's administrators, students, staff members, professors, athletes — or some combination of each.

Above all, we hope that there is something of interest in these pages for everyone who picks up a copy of the Middlebury Sports Magazine and that you will spend a few moments reflecting on the issues that we have addressed.

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The Middlebury Sports Magazine (USPS 556-060), the student sports magazine of Middlebury College, is published by The Middlebury Campus Publications. Editorial and business offices are located in Hepburn Hall Annex, Middlebury College. The Middlebury Sports Magazine is produced on Apple Macintosh computers using Adobe InDesign CS5 and is printed by Queen City Publishing in Burlington, Vermont. Mailing address: The Middlebury Campus, Drawer 30, Middlebury College, Middlebury Vt., 05753. Business phone: (802) 443-5737. Please address distribution concerns to the Business Director. First class postage paid at Middlebury, Vt., 05753.

THE SPRIN

PROFILES BY JOE MACDONALD AND ALEX MORRIS
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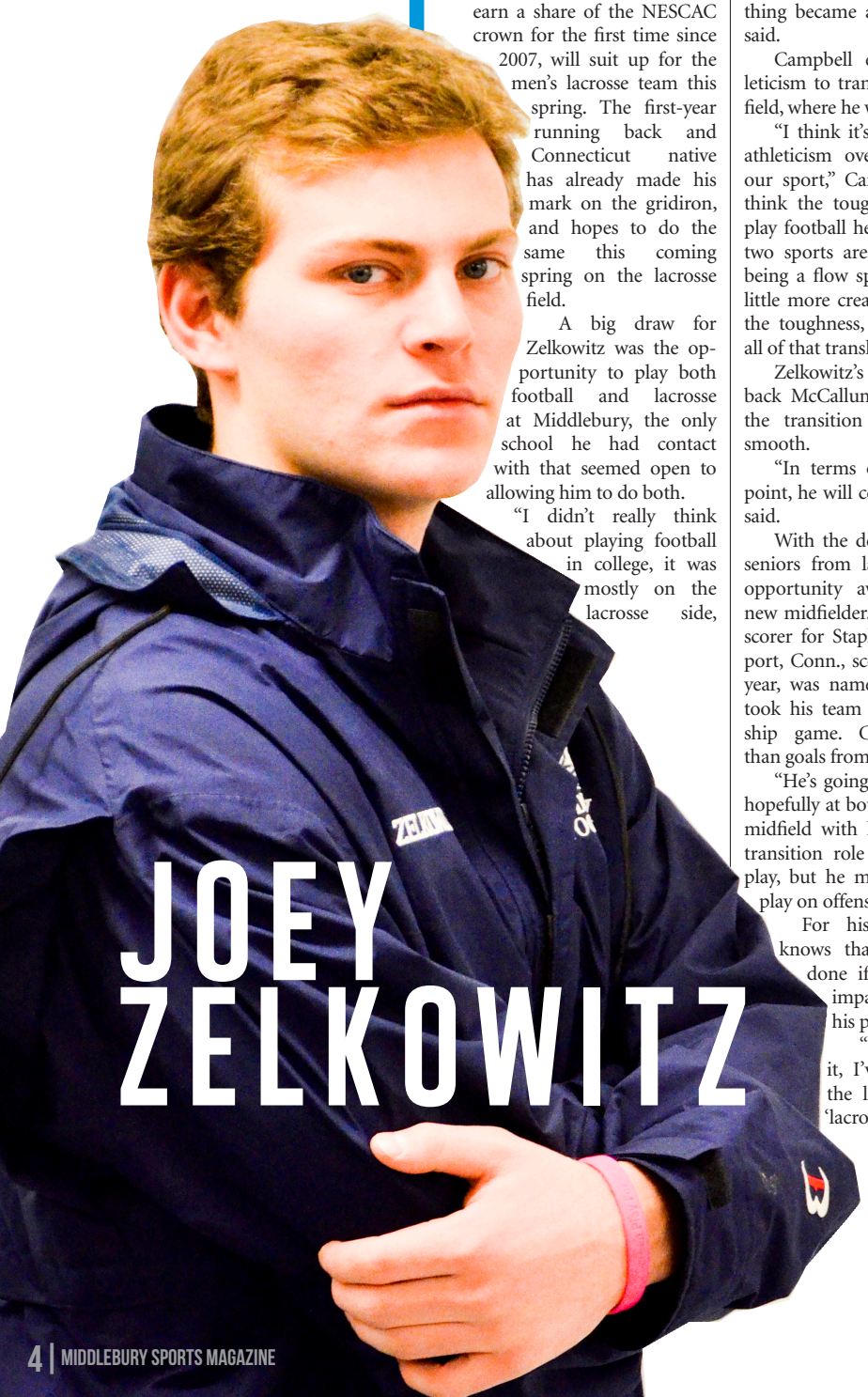


JOEY ZELKOWITZ

Toey Zelkowitz '17, who played a significant part in helping the football team earn a share of the NESCAC crown for the first time since 2007, will suit up for the men's lacrosse team this spring. The first-year running back and Connecticut native has already made his mark on the gridiron, and hopes to do the same this coming spring on the lacrosse field.

A big draw for Zelkowitz was the opportunity to play both football and lacrosse at Middlebury, the only school he had contact with that seemed open to allowing him to do both.

"I didn't really think about playing football in college, it was mostly on the lacrosse side, and then [head coach Dave] Campbell asked me if I wanted to talk to the football coaches and the whole football thing became a real option," Zelkowitz said.

Campbell expects Zelkowitz's athleticism to translate well to the lacrosse field, where he will compete this spring.

"I think it's the strength, speed and athleticism overall that cross over to our sport," Campbell said. "I certainly think the toughness that's required to play football helps as well, although the two sports are very different. Lacrosse being a flow sport, you need to have a little more creativity, but I think, again, the toughness, the speed, the strength, all of that translates."

Zelkowitz's teammate and quarterback McCallum Foote '14, agreed that the transition to lacrosse should be smooth.

"In terms of a pure athletic stand point, he will certainly stand out," Foote said.

With the departure of a number of seniors from last year's playoff squad, opportunity awaits for the Panthers' new midfielder. Zelkowtiz was a prolific scorer for Staples High School in Wesport, Conn., scoring 56 goals his senior year, was named an All-American and took his team to the State Championship game. Campbell expects more than goals from the first-year middie.

"He's going to be able to contribute hopefully at both ends of the field in the midfield with his speed, maybe in the transition role that we have our guys play, but he may be skilled enough to play on offense," Campbell said.

For his own part, Zelkowitz knows that there is work to be done if he hopes to make his impact this spring equal to his performance in the fall.

"I've got to get back into it, I've got to work hard in the little time I have to get 'lacrosse ready,' because I really don't have that much time while everyone else has been playing in the fall," Zelkowitz said.

For Zelkowitz, the skills he displayed in football, particularly his quick first step, ability to avoid the first defender and run in open space, will be his biggest assets come the spring.

As enthusiastic as the coaching staff is to see what he can do for the program, Zelkowitz is equally eager to work with his new coaches and develop his own game.

"I'm excited to see coach Campbell on the field and get some advice from him and be coached up," he said.

Zelkowitz's Middlebury athletic career started off successfully last fall. Having seen other Staples graduates have success in the blue and white, head football coach Bob Ritter was convinced that Zelkowitz would be an asset on the football field. As Zelkowitz continued to impress throughout training camp, displaying above average speed and a natural ability to make tacklers miss, the coaching staff's expectations grew leading into week one.

"After preseason, we had hoped that we could get the ball in his hands 12 to 14 times and get it to him in space, and really thought that he could have a big impact and sure enough, he did," Ritter said. "That was exciting to see."

As the season progressed and Zelkowitz continued to contribute — racking up 416 total yards and four touchdowns in six games — Zelkowitz's name began to gain weight in the NESCAC Rookie of the Year discussion. Ultimately, injury sidelined Zelkowitz for the last two games, but his potential had already been revealed.

"I think that going forward he's a guy we want to have the ball in his hands quite a bit through the course of a game," Ritter said.

From the sound of things, Campbell has similar plans for Zelkowitz's multidimensional skill set.

G OF '17

Halfway through their first-years at college, there are some students who are already starting to attract attention on Middlebury's courts, fields, and tracks. Here are four to watch.

MARY O'CONNELL

As a freshman on Norwell High School's women's lacrosse team, Mary O'Connell '17 sprinted to her sister, Kara, an All-American defender and senior captain, and hugged her in the moments after their Division II state title victory. Just three years later in 2013, O'connell, then a senior captain, was able to bask in the glory of one more state championship, this time embraced by her freshman sister, Jane. Lacrosse and success seem to run in the O'Connell family.

"[Winning a state championship] was a great way to close out the season and my career in high school," O'Connell said. "I think winning a state championship is something not many people get to experience and for me to have been able to experience that twice is really exciting."

However, for O'Connell, the trophies that have decorated her lacrosse career are the not the most gratifying part of the sport. Growing up in Norwell, a small town on the south shore in Massachusetts, girls often play together from third grade through their senior year of high school.

"Just being on a team and playing with my closest friends on the team for the past eight to nine years has been the most exciting part of the experience," she said.

One of O'Connell's former high school teammates is current Middlebury midfielder Lexi DeMarco '15. Having played with multiple members of the O'Connell for years, DeMarco shares in O'Connell's love for the atmosphere fostered by playing in a small town and is excited to be reunited with the first-year.

"I only played with Mary for two years in high school, but she really grew so much in those two years and became such a force of the team," DeMarco said. "I loved playing with her … and I think she has the mental and physical toughness to be on this Middlebury team."

As early as sixth grade, travelling with her club team, Mass Elite, to tournaments and seeing college coaches, O'Connell knew that she wanted to pursue lacrosse in college. She remembers feeling a mixture of emotions when she finally started the recruiting process her junior year of high school by attending numerous camps and tournaments.

"It was definitely really stressful but now looking back on it, it was very rewarding ending up here," O'Connell said.

It was at a number of recruiting tournaments and camps where O'Connell caught the eye of head coach Missy Foote. Describing her as a versatile player with an "amazing stick," Foote immediately could see the midfielder as a big asset to her team's attack.

"I love her style of play, I loved how she could do anything with her stick, which is really unusual for a high school player," Foote said. "Most kids don't get that level of stick skill until they get to college and she had it as a junior. I just liked how smooth she was and she just makes it look effortless."

DeMarco echoed Foote's appraisal of O'Connell's skills.

"I think her shot and her drive to goal have always stood out to me," she said. "Every time she shoots, it's with confidence and she knows where she's placing it; she's not just shooting to shoot, she's shooting to score. She's done so well with that because of her confidence and strength. She's not timid when it comes to defenders and she knows what she wants."

Co-captain and goaltender Alyssa Palomba '14 has already witnessed the offensive threat that O'Connell will bring to the Middlebury team, fielding numerous shots in practice from the first-year and her "low-hanging stick."

"This girl can rip," Palomba said. "She's very smart about the way she plays and that's a huge asset because you can have a really great shot which she does, but if you're not smart about where you're placing it that it can work to your disadvantage. She's whizzed a ton by me already, which is good but also a little frustrating."

O'Connell grappled with the decision between Division I and Division III, finally acknowledging that she would have more of a life as a student at a Division III institution where she could focus more on her academics. The prestige of the Middlebury lacrosse program was also a significant pull for O'Connell.

"I met [Missy Foote] going into my junior year and she's an unbelievable coach and [she] and the team are nationally recognized as well," O'Connell said. "For me to have the opportunity to hopefully be able to play here is a huge accomplishment for myself."

Despite earning the praise of both her teammates and her coach, O'Connell only has one goal before looking too much into the future.

"My goal is first off to make the team, and then to make an impact whether it be on the field or on the sideline and hopefully get some playing time," she said.

In the meantime O'Connell is enjoying the inclusive nature of the lacrosse team and of Middlebury as a whole, and hopes to repay the kindness of her teammates by making a big impact both on and off the field.

Foote has no doubts that O'Connell can make a big contribution this season and in years to come.

"Every first-year faces that same challenge, which is to get quicker and to make their decisions even quicker, and that's the main difference between high school and college lacrosse," Foote said. "But for now I definitely think Mary will fit into our style of play really well."

DYLAN TAKAMORI

For Dylan Takamori '17, a left-handed pitcher from Honolulu, Hawaii, baseball has always been running through his veins. Born in Boston, Mass., Takamori began playing baseball and watching the Boston Red Sox at the age of three.

"I guess the interest started off when I was really young," Takamori said. "My dad really loves baseball and he even memorized a lot of the statistics in the baseball almanac. It came natural to like baseball because my dad did."

Takamori's life drastically changed when his family moved to Hawaii when he was nine and halfway through his fourth grade year. Takamori's career went on hiatus until the following summer. When he returned to the diamond, he noticed a higher level of competition than he had ever experienced before.

"Baseball is always around [in Hawaii] and I played it nine months of the year since I was nine," he said. "I find that the level of competition is higher because of its continuity and because there are less people as well. I don't know, I just always felt it was more intense."

Baseball switched from a mere pastime to a serious endeavor for Takamori when he moved into high school. By the time he reached his sophomore year at Punahou High School, Takamori realized that he could play in college.

"I knew I wanted to play baseball at the next level since sophomore year in high school," Takamori said. "Before then, I always saw myself having a normal college experience at a big university, but through the mentorship of my coaches and a lot of other parents, I saw that baseball could be used to get to a better school. I used [baseball] as a vehicle in that sense and just tried to do my best from thereon out to try to make a college team."

In August before his senior year, Takamori travelled all the way to Long Island, NY to participate in a Headfirst Showcase while touring schools in the Northeast. There he first caught the eye of Middlebury head baseball coach Bob Smith.

"I basically just had a conversation with [Dylan] after I saw him play, and I said I really liked the way he played, and the next thing you know he's very interested in applying to Middlebury," Smith said.

Takamori toured Middlebury online, trusting the word of his father, former classmates and other parents who encouraged him to apply. After being accepted, Takamori began to look forward to what his collegiate baseball career would bring.

"I knew that being on a college team was going to be a lot more intense than in high school," Takamori said. "I also knew that playing at a collegiate level was going to be way more of a commitment so I prepared myself in that way to do whatever I could to be the best in that field."

Takamori also does not deny feeling nervous on his first day of captains' practice in the fall.

"I was very anxious knowing that many of my other teammates were also recruits, so I was anxious to see where I stood," Takamori said. "It was only natural that they fulfilled my expectations of being great athletes, so it's nice to know that I'm surrounded by peers who are also avid about baseball and work hard; it keeps me motivated."

Smith, however, is confident that Takamori has the capability to play in college. Due to the nature of baseball, pitchers are often prioritized in the recruiting process with the chance of making an immediate contribution. After acknowledging a disappointing performance in some key positions last year, Smith is hoping that Takamori and other first-years can step up to fill the stops.

"My hope is that once he gets comfortable at the college level he's just going to get better and better," Smith said. "My feeling — and what I know of him — is that he's a good guy and is going to be a great team player. He's got a skill set that makes him very attractive for our team this coming spring."

Tri-captain Dylan Kane '14 also believes that Takamori has the potential to be a game-changer this spring.

"During our fall and winter practices, he has shown that he has the potential to meaningfully contribute to the team this season," Kane said. "Takamori is a hard worker and I believe he will be an excellent teammate this spring."

In order to live up to Smith's expectations, Takamori is focusing on doing the little things right.

"The small things like coming every day to practice with a good work ethic and good attitude will go a long way," Takamori said. "I'm looking to improve on becoming more consistent in my pitching, increasing velocity on the ball and perfecting my mechanics, as well as bringing a certain demeanor when I'm playing that can help to inspire my teammate to go all out when they're playing."

Describing Takamori as a "deceptive lefty," a quality invaluable in the NESCAC that lacks many big-time lefty pitchers, tri-captain Eric Truss '15 thinks that it is Takamori's intensity that will distinguish him as a first-year.

"You can definitely see that he has an intensity level when he gets to the lines and once the game starts," Truss said. "He's a very easy going kid off the field, but once the game starts, he's very focused and not thinking about anything else."

For now, the lefty pitcher is enjoying baseball at Middlebury, despite the drastic change in climate, that has forced him to wear sweatpants to practice for the first time in his life.

"You take for granted the open skies above you, the real grass, and playing outside all the time," Takamori said. "It's definitely an adjustment to make, but it's one I should be able to make."

And if the baseball adage is true — that cold weather aids pitchers — then the sweatpants should be a welcome addition.

After winning four distance-running state championships during her senior year at Lawrence High School in Albion, Maine, Erzsebet Nagy '17 had high hopes for her first year at Middlebury. And in spite of her past success, Nagy's fall season on the cross-country course still managed to surpass even her own expectations.

"I didn't know specifically time-wise what to expect, especially racing a 6K (because we raced 5K's high school), and I had no idea how fast the other girls were on the team, but I think I probably exceeded any expectations that I could have had anyways. I was really happy with my [cross-country] season," she said.

Nagy consistently finished among the Panthers' top-five runners all season, and often in the top 10 overall at some smaller meets. Nagy came in second at NESCACs, blazed to a fifth-place finish at the New England Regionals and finished 42nd at the NCAA Championships, a finish that would have been higher had Nagy not collapsed about five meters from the finish line. Before falling and crawling across the line, Nagy had been in a position to finish in the top-35, which would have warranted All-American honors. However, overexertion got the best of her during the final sprint.

"I really wanted to give it all I had at nationals because I felt like I had nothing to lose," Nagy said. "That was the most physical pain I have ever made my body go through."

This cross-country season proved that Nagy already has the ability to compete with Division III's top runners, something that head coach Martin Beatty did not fully expect.

"My expectations were that she would be a great 800 runner for us in track," he said. "I had no idea of how good of a runner she'd be in cross country, too. And the 800 is becoming more and more of a sprint in track and field, and so for her to have that capability of running such good 800 times and then to really start banging the doors down with great times in cross country is astounding."

For now, Juliet Ryan-Davis '13 holds the Middlebury women's 800 meter outdoor record, with a time of 2:07.73. In 2013, Ryan-Davis won NESCACs with a time of 2:13:73. Meanwhile, Nagy ran a 2:13:50 in last year's state championship 800-meter meet, an event that Nagy admits is her best, if not her favorite.

"I think my best time relative to other times is the 800 … [but] I don't like the 800 very much," Nagy said.

Running is a tradition that has been passed down on Nagy's mother's side of the family. Her cousin ran the 800 at Amherst, her mother has run marathons, and her uncle was in the Olympic trials for the marathon. Nagy started distance running her sophomore year of high school, and has been committed to it ever since. In the past few years, she has toned down her running during the winter months and focused on cross-training, never running indoor track. That annual reprieve has kept Nagy fresh.

"I don't think that I'm anywhere near burning out," she said. "I still love running, and I know that's always a problem for some people."

For the first time, Nagy will compete during the indoor track season this winter, but her main focus will be to increase her intensity during the winter months and hit her peak once outdoor season starts again.

The relatively low mileage on her legs, her commitment and her intensity have convinced Beatty that Nagy has plenty of room to grow.

"She shows a lot of promise," Beatty said. "She's coming in running faster than any other first-year running the 800. So who knows how fast she can go? We'll see."

And how has Nagy's arrival helped fill the void left by Ryan-Davis and fellow accomplished distance runner and classmate Addie Tousley?

"Oh, thank God for her," Beatty said.

Often the transition from high school to college can be challenging for first-year runners. That has not been the case for Nagy.

"With the new environment and stuff it can be hard for people to even run as fast as they did before, so if I can just match that, at least, [in the spring], that would be really good," Nagy said.

Part of that comfort is due to the fact that Nagy and the rest of the first-year distance runners have immediately clicked. Adding to that close-knit relationship is the fact that the distance runners work with the same group and coach, Nicole Wilkerson, throughout the entire school year.

"My teammates have been everything," Nagy said. "It has been kind of an effort to not always sit with the team and make other friends, but it's been fine. They're always so supportive in practice and out of practice."

Coach Beatty has noticed that connection already, as well.

"I had all of the first-years over to my house for dinner at the beginning of the fall semester, and that group of first-year women are all sitting around my kitchen table, and you can just tell that their bond is tight," Beatty said.

Runners are often accused of being obsessed by the sport, but Nagy finds joy in something much less arduous than tracking her miles: Seinfeld.

"I used to watch my parents watch Seinfeld," she said. "I grew to appreciate how relevant every situation is in Seinfeld; it's quirky and dorky and I think every situation is hilarious."

As for school, Nagy wants to major in molecular biology and chemistry so she can work in the field of exercise physiology. But she will never give up running entirely.

"It depends on how college running goes," Nagy said. "I do plan on continuing to run. I really want to [run a marathon] at some point."

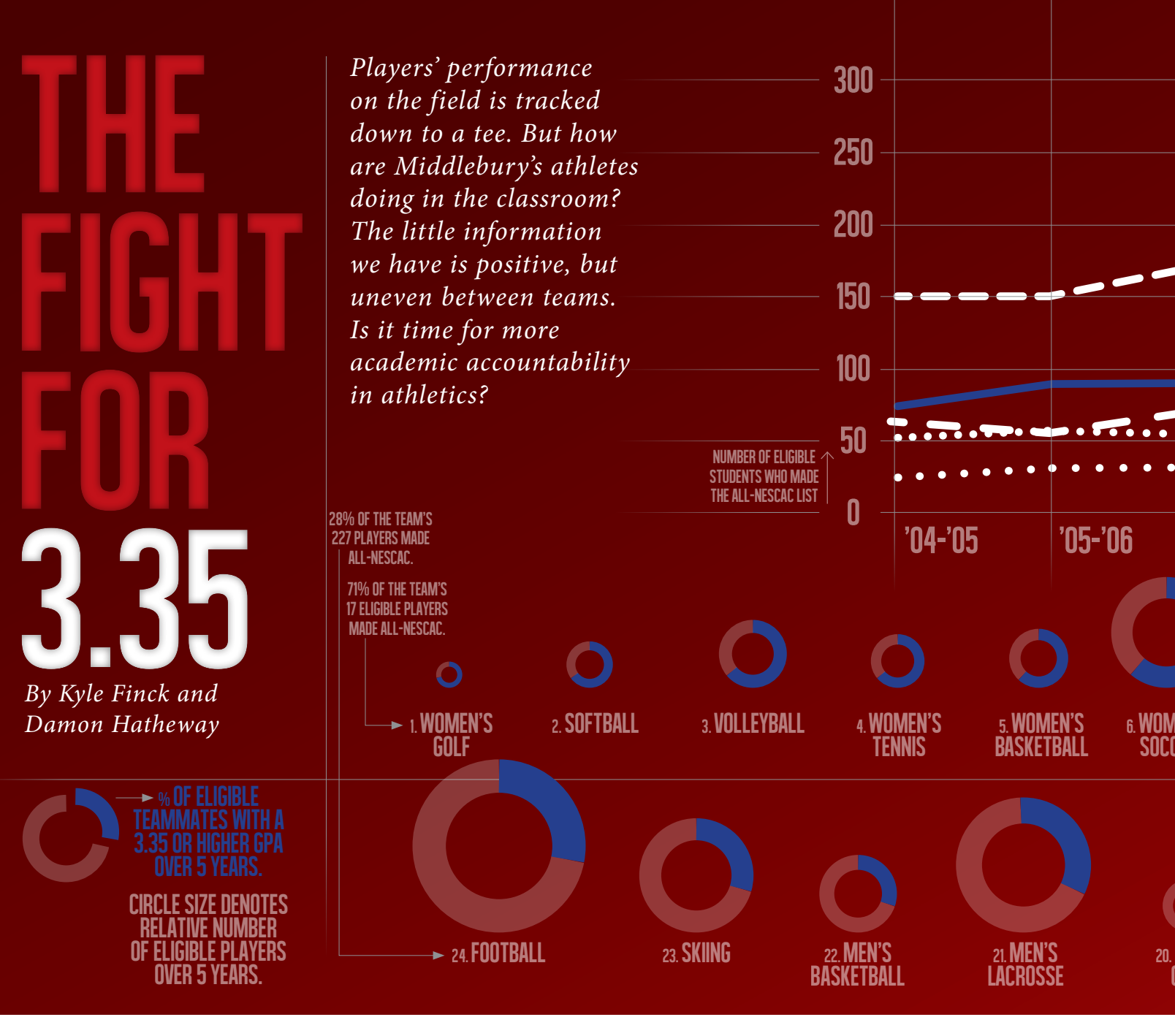
For the time being, Nagy has her eyes — and feet — set on a slightly shorter distance. But the prospect of breaking Middlebury's program record in the 800 carries marathon-level expectations.

ERZSEBET NAGY

THE FIGHT FOR 3.35

Players' performance on the field is tracked down to a tee. But how are Middlebury's athletes doing in the classroom? The little information we have is positive, but uneven between teams. Is it time for more academic accountability in athletics?

By Kyle Finck and Damon Hatheway



If one clicks through Middlebury's athletics website, one will find a host of data on any of the College's close to 700 varsity athletes – from batting average in the month of May to three point percentage in conference play. But while Middlebury meticulously tracks the performances of its athletes and teams on the field — and makes it available for public consumption — the school does not take the same approach to performance in the classroom. Did the NESCAC-champion football team do as well with the pen and pencil as with the pigskin? Does a Division I ski team mean sacrificing elite Division III scholars? Should the public know the answers?

There is no specific data on team grade point averages (GPA), but there are clues. Every season, each team compiles a list of players who have a career GPA of at least 3.35 – slightly above a B+ average – and submits them to the NESCAC, which proudly publishes the names.

The *Middlebury Sports Magazine* analyzed All-NESCAC Academic lists comprising thousands of athletes from more than a decade at every school in the conference, comparing Middlebury to its competitors on the field, as well as team-by-team data within the College. The data paints a rough but telling picture, one that is largely positive – if unevenly distributed – of Middlebury athletes.

The interest in academic performance among college athletes is not unfounded. In 2005, Charles A. Dana Professor of Mathematics John Emerson helped lead The College Sports Project, which compiled academic data from 84 D-III schools over five years to determine whether or not athletics had an adverse affect on academic performance.

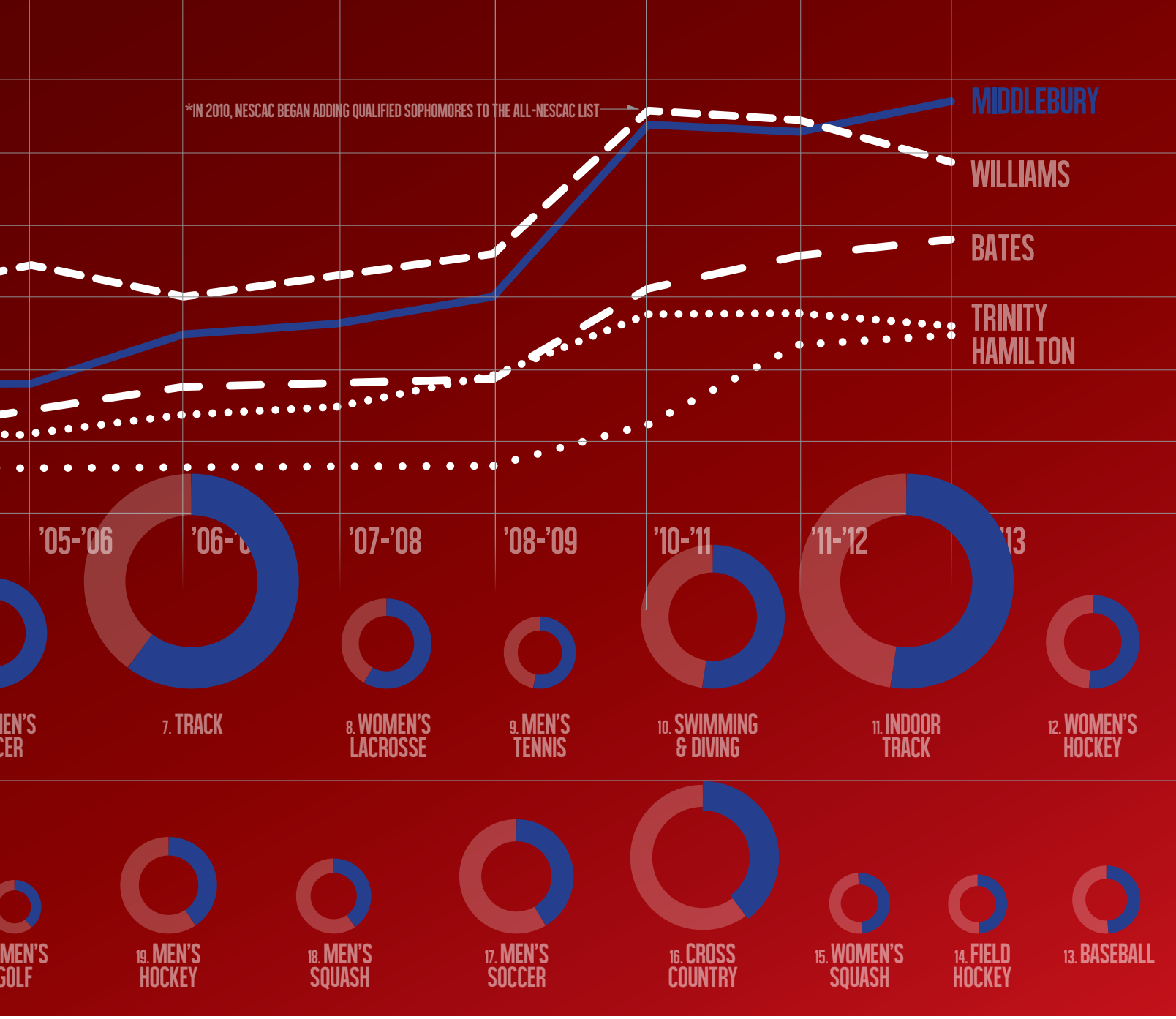
The results were clear: athletic participation affects grades. Within the findings, there are numerous subtleties: women were affected far less; and recruited male athletes saw the largest divergence from their non-varsity athlete peers. But the most problematic divergence came from what Emerson termed "helmeted sports."

The College Sports Project was kept general by design. While Emerson has the academic data for Middlebury athletes, he is legally barred from releasing any specific information. As a result, *MSM*'s analysis of Academic All-NESCAC results is one of the only inroads into the world of academic performance of Middlebury athletes.

Of the 11 schools that make up the NESCAC, Middlebury lives up to its elite reputation. In the 2012-13 academic year, the College placed 288 athletes above the 3.35 cutoff, edging Tufts by five for the high-water mark in the conference.

Director of Athletics Erin Quinn attributed the academic success to a culture of excellence that he originally emphasized as the head coach of the men's lacrosse team and brought with him as he rose to his current position as Director of Athletics.

"If you boil it down to what we are expecting out of our athletes and our programs, it is athletics, academics and community," he said. "There is never one thing that breeds academic success. It is articulating the importance of academics, but doing so in a way that is authentic. That isn't quantifiable. It's more than a



GPA."

Over the past nine years, the entire conference has steadily placed more athletes into the ranks of All-Academic. One significant factor that led to the increase was a lowering of the barrier for who could receive the accolade, which changed four years ago when the conference decided to extend eligibility to sophomores. In years prior, only juniors and seniors were recognized.

"The impetus for the change is that when it was just juniors and seniors, you eliminate half the people in the school," Quinn said. "There is enough body of work by your sophomore year that it deserves recognition."

But the rate of increase among All-Academic recipients between schools is by no means uniform.

Trinity, for example, had fewer than half as many All-Academic athletes as Middlebury last year, with only 130. Trinity was the only school in the NESCAC to actually place fewer athletes below the 3.35 mark than the year before. While Trinity has two fewer varsity athletic teams than Middlebury (27 vs. 29, respectively), this fact hardly accounts for the massive disparity.

Are student-athletes at Trinity simply not as smart as many of their NESCAC competitors?

"I don't want to surmise or throw things out there just for the sake of it," Quinn said. "Culturally, all of the NESCAC schools are similar. There aren't different camps among the NESCAC schools."

But the data paints a picture that is in fact divided along All-NESCAC academic lines.

The bottom three schools – Hamilton, Connecticut College and Trinity – all had at least 100 fewer student-athletes recognized as All-NESCAC Academic athletes than Middlebury.

Just as schools around the NESCAC display dramatic differences in the number of student-athletes they place on All-NESCAC Academic lists each year, the data for team-by-team comparisons within Middlebury demonstrates a significant disparity from one team to the next. The data, while limited in its scope, outlines a worrying trend that, on its face, corroborates the findings of the College Sports Project: men's teams place a smaller percentage of their athletes on All-Academic teams, with "helmeted sports" accounting for the bottom quartile of teams in the data set. Football, skiing, men's lacrosse and men's hockey accounted for four of the bottom six teams in the 24-team data set. Conversely, women's teams accounted for the top quartile of All-Academic rates, with softball the only notable exception to Emerson's findings on "helmeted sports." What accounts for these divergences? According to track and field head coach, Martin Beatty, whose program was the most successful of any co-ed team by All-Academic standards between 2008 and 2013, the varying degrees to which teams receive help from admissions plays a significant role.

"With runners, we don't get as much help from admissions," Beatty said. "So it doesn't surprise me that we're getting a bigger percentage who are All-NESCAC or

doing well academically because they have to get in on their own. There are some great athletes out there who I'd love to have here, but they're just missing academically. If they were a football player, they'd probably get in, but because they're track [athletes], I can't touch them."

Quinn emphasized that individual teams face varying constraints in the recruiting process, however. While teams such as Nordic and Alpine skiing draw from a smaller pool of applicants, others like the football team require strict specialization at certain positions, creating a delicate balancing act in the recruiting process.

"I think of it as a jigsaw puzzle," Quinn said. "It's not as clean as saying, 'We have four spots, who are the top four skiers?' Maybe the best skier is also the best student, but that skier decides to go to Dartmouth. You're doing this give and take where the best four athletes that are the most interested in Middlebury might be [at a certain academic level], but you just don't have the ability to recruit that many people in that range, academically."

While the recruiting pool for the ski programs is restricted both by region and socioeconomic status, even sports with expansive recruiting bases can be hamstrung by specific positional needs.

THE RESULTS WERE CLEAR: ATHLETIC PARTICIPATION AFFECTS GRADES.

"Whatever the pool is, for whatever sport, the more specific you get, the more challenging it is," Quinn said. "While there are a lot of football players out there, if you really need to find a defensive tackle, you're trying to find a defensive tackle who can play at a certain level, who fits a certain academic band that is, relatively speaking to the rest of the country, really narrow and who also wants to come to Middlebury College. So it does present a lot of challenges, even for the sport with bigger numbers to choose from."

The uneven allocation of recruiting resources remains a "pet peeve" for Beatty, however, who faces his own challenges around specialization in track and field.

"That's the daunting task that I have recruiting for track — it's a big-number sport," Beatty said. "There are 18 events and men and women so there's a huge volume of people that I go through. There are some areas that are tougher to recruit for than others: it's a lot tougher to recruit men than it is women; it's tougher to recruit throwers than distance runners; and harder to find women throwers than men throwers. And the ones that are really good out there who are academically that good are taken by the D-Is or [the Ivy League]. So that's how the pool gets really small there."

Recruiting is not the only variable that needs to be taken into consideration. In some cases, the sample size for the team population is so small — the women's golf team had 17 eligible players, of whom 12 were All-Academic selections — that no sweeping conclusions can be formed. This raises the question of whether team-by-team comparisons should be made at all. Head Men's Soccer Coach Dave Saward argued they should not.

"In an academic environment there probably should be or could be [some data available], but what I don't like is 'well if they're doing it, why isn't that team doing it?'" he said. "I don't like this setting up of other teams, just because somebody else has done something special. I think you have to be careful of that because then students get jealous of other students and you start to break up this unity that a small campus should strive for."

Football coach Bob Ritter, meanwhile, feels that sport-specific comparisons more accurately depict the academic performance of teams.

"Football is unique in its size and recruiting scope and the spectrum [of players] that you're going to have on the team," Ritter said. "If you compare the Middlebury football team with the other NESCAC football teams it gives you a better sense than comparing us to the other sports. This year we had a great season: we won a share of the title and we had the All-Academic NESCAC players of any of the football team."

Fifteen members of Ritter's conference-champion team were named NESCAC All-Academic in the fall of 2013. No other NESCAC football team had more than 11 players selected.

The question of academic accountability in athletics is contentious and more nuanced than a simple yes or no answer.

"One of the major issues with academics and athletes is that from a faculty, or even administrative point of view, nobody knows how well athletes actually do academically," Assistant Professor of Writing Hector Vila said. "That ethos filters down to the general population at the College. People find out you're an athlete, and they're like, 'another dumb jock.'"

If anybody understands the nuance of academics in athletics it is Vila, who serves as the academic liaison to the 75-player football team, where he works with both the numerical and personal side of the complex question.

But Quinn bristles at the notion of releasing even general team academic data.

"If you're not playing on a sports team, your academic information isn't available," he said. "Therefore, we shouldn't have athlete's academic information available. Even to release team stuff would get too personal."

Beyond the privacy issues, Quinn said he did not think GPA is necessarily a good barometer of whether a team or student-athlete is successful, both in and out of the classroom.

"If you add the different things people bring to the College — let's say they have a 3.2 GPA and a 3.8 commitment to the community — do those things average out to an acceptable grade? The more specific you get, the more challenging it is."

But Vila said that in an era where Middlebury students put more stock in their grades than ever before, GPA is a strong indicator of student involvement.

"If you break a GPA down by syllabi, most classes on this campus will have x percent for essays, y percent for presentations and z percent for participation," he said. "You know what that looks like. It's tough to get an A at Middlebury. Every professor is trying to get their students to engage on multiple levels, so GPA is a good indication of whether or not you're doing okay."

Furthermore, Quinn believed that releasing team-specific GPAs would lead to negative stereotyping — a fear that Vila shared but emphasized already happens on the football team.

"I don't think there is anything to be gained by having a number attached to a particular group that only lends itself to negative stereotypes" Quinn said.

"These student athletes are facing many of the same problems as Posse students," Vila said. "What I see is the emotional and psychological piece of building the confidence of a guy who is an incredible linebacker on the field, but whose confidence starts to get knocked down because of the academics."

But releasing team GPAs would not promote only negative stereotypes. The track and field team had 36 athletes make the 3.35 cut last year, more than any other team.

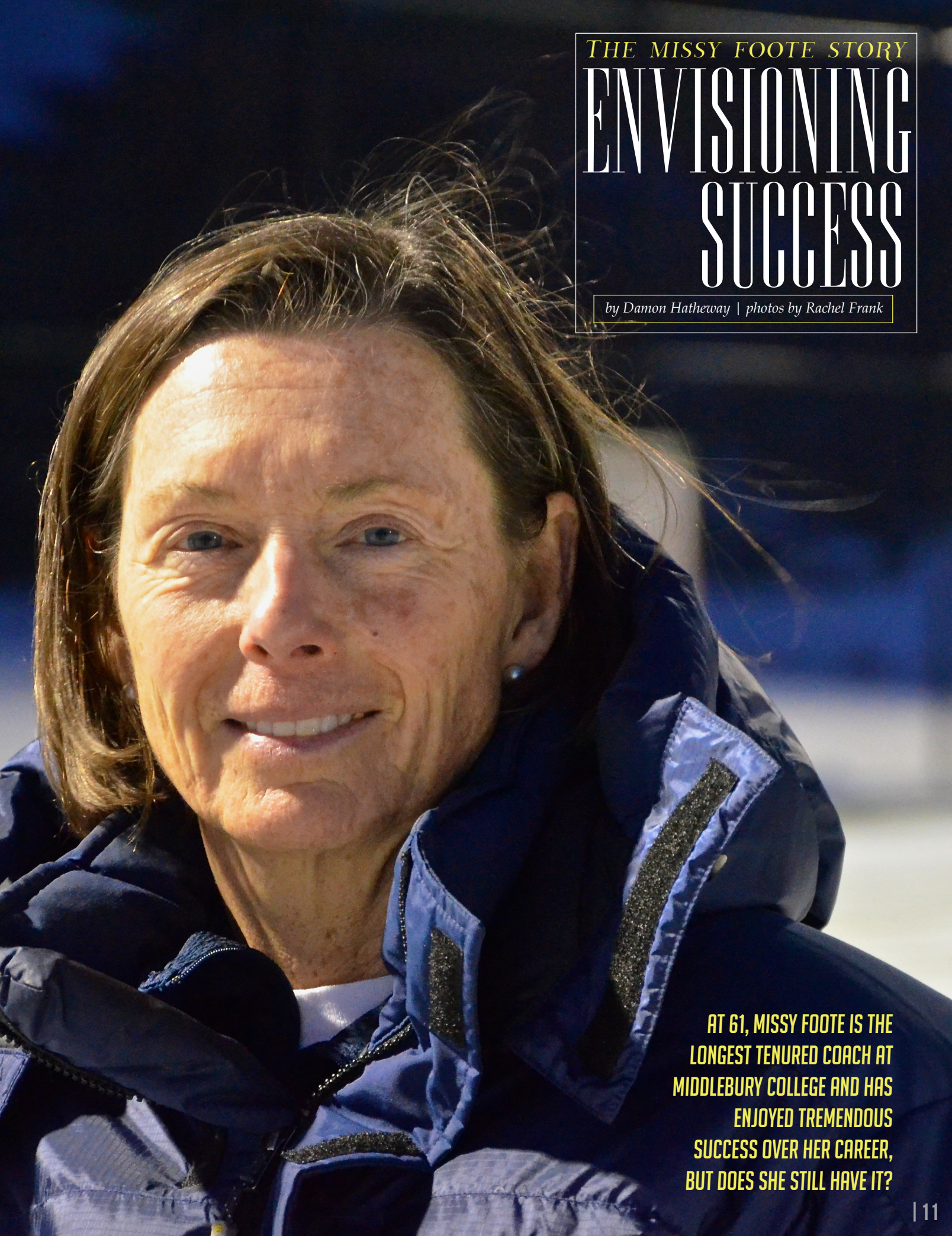
"[Academic information] is always a wonderful thing to see where we are," Beatty said. "I think the Admissions office and the President's office like to see if we're doing the right thing. NESCAC has all these rules around recruiting with academics now and I think it's always great to study ourselves and see if we're where we want to be. Are we holding to our mission while still having a high level of athletics as well?"

Quinn said that the athletic department does collect academic data, and uses it as part of a holistic evaluation of teams, coaches and players. He assured *MSM* that he did not have grave concerns at this time about his teams' performance in the classroom. "Internally, we are better equipped to look at the bigger picture than if we published GPA and people made a subjective evaluation based on that number," he said. "I guess we're okay with people making that subjective evaluation about how we teach batting [based on a player's batting average] and not so much about the academic things."

ABOUT THE DATA

The All-NESCAC Academic data analyzed by *MSM was collected* from nescac.com. For school-to-school analysis, raw totals were compiled and compared as each NESCAC school has roughly the same number of student-athletes.

However, the same process was not applied to team-by-team comparisons. Because the roster size of teams varies considerably, MSM analyzed individual teams by looking at the number of All-NESCAC Academic student-athletes selected from each team as a percentage of the number of eligible players each team had for All-Academic honors.

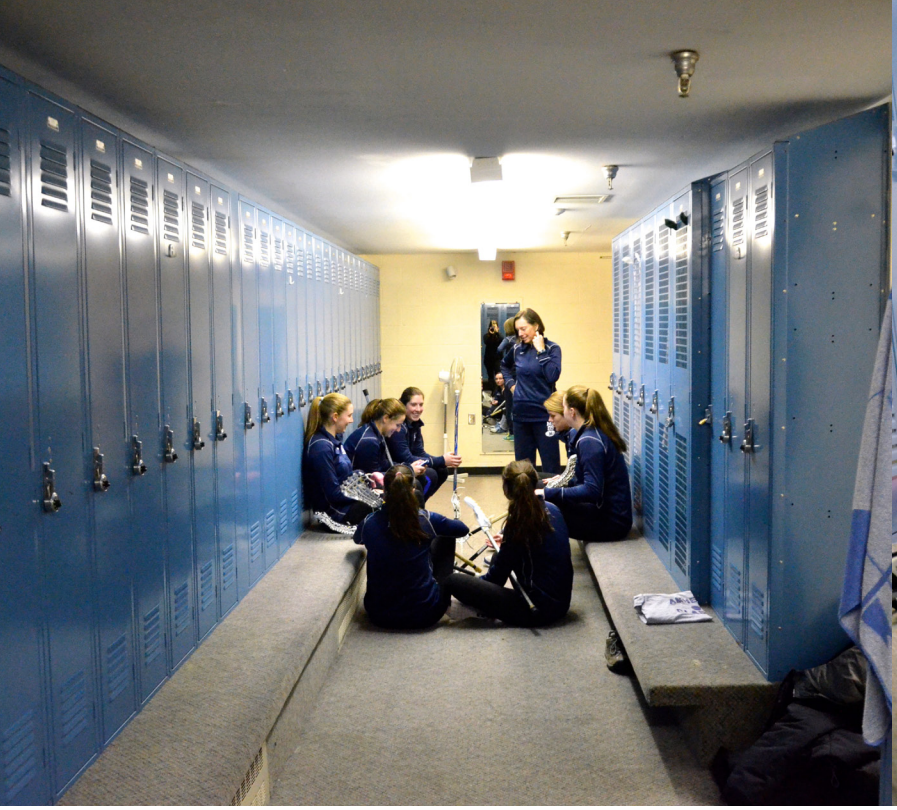


THE MISSY FOOTE STORY

ENVISIONING SUCCESS

by Damon Hatheway | photos by Rachel Frank

AT 61, MISSY FOOTE IS THE LONGEST TENURED COACH AT MIDDLEBURY COLLEGE AND HAS ENJOYED TREMENDOUS SUCCESS OVER HER CAREER, BUT DOES SHE STILL HAVE IT?



When I ask Missy Foote, the head coach of the women's lacrosse team and Middlebury's Senior Women's Administrator, how many national championships she has won over the course of her career, she pauses for a moment and starts recalling them one-by-one, deliberately ticking them off her fingers.

The number is five — not so many that Foote, who was inducted into the National Lacrosse Hall of Fame in 2012, forgets out of the sheer gluttony of her success, but rather because each of the 33 women's lacrosse teams she has coached has its own distinct story, equally worthy of remembrance in her mind.

"Missy's big motto is that you stand on the shoulders of those who came before you," said Bates assistant coach Heidi Allen '99, who won three national championships, while playing lacrosse and field hockey for Foote.

Of course, Foote stands on the shoulders of those who came before her as well, though you would be forgiven for thinking that Foote and women's lacrosse originated close to simultaneously.

After graduating from Springfield College in the spring of 1974 — two years into the fledgling Title IX era — Foote accepted a job at Green Mountain Union High School in Chester, Vt., to coach basketball and field hockey. But by that point she had already fallen "in love" with lacrosse and created a program at the school. The interest was infectious — "all of these young girls loved a sport where you could pick your head up and run," she recalled — but Foote's movement faced one major obstacle: the school did not have sticks or uniforms for her players. So the 21-year old coach did the only thing that made sense: she and her team made their own equipment.

"Brine gave us some lacrosse heads and we made our own handles out of wood," she explained. "We cut down ash trees and shaved the handles and made them fit the heads. And we made our own uniforms."

Two years later, while perusing the *Boston Globe* in search of jobs for a friend, Foote noticed a job advertisement for a women's lacrosse coach at Middlebury College. Instead of forwarding the news, she dashed off a resume on her typewriter, mailed her letter of intent and visited the school for an interview. Nearly 40 years and 394 career wins later, Foote is a member of the National Lacrosse Hall of Fame and Middlebury's longest-tenured coach.

My mom arrived at Middlebury a year after Missy Foote, in the fall of 1978, and played both lacrosse and field hockey for Foote. Some 30 years later, when I was in high school, enduring the rigors of my senior basketball season — inevitably groaning about the strenuous morning workout I had just finished — my mom would hark back to her days running up something called Chipman Hill with her coach Missy and tell me to get over myself. I rolled my eyes and thought, "What could she know?" — some combination of a younger generation's hubris and, I now suspect, a wholly unfair assumption of what it meant to be a female athlete in the late seventies fueling my derision.

And in the Seventies there were assumptions abound about female athletics.

"We were moving from the era of women go to playdays and eat oranges at halftime and there was no score kept," Foote said. "It was considered a male-dominated world and women didn't want to have masculine traits."

Misguided perception was far from the only speed bump that Foote would overrun, however. When she started at Middlebury, Foote was one of three female coaches and, in a two-year span, coached swimming, basketball, field hockey and lacrosse. And while her male colleagues competed on fields in the shadow of the field house and utilized sport-specific locker rooms, Foote's teams shared none of the same amenities. The field hockey and lacrosse teams competed on Battell Field — the center quad for what was previously the women's side of campus — while the women's basketball and swimming teams shared one locker room with all women's sports teams, friend and foe, as well as the rest of the female student body.

"[At half time of the basketball game] both teams would go up [to the locker room]," Foote said. "So we'd be on one side of the long row of lockers in the middle that were tall enough that you couldn't see over, but you could sure hear what was going on. And the other team would be on the other side and students would be walking in and out to change to go play squash or whatever they were doing. It was anything less than ideal."

By the mid-eighties Title IX had, "really lost its teeth," Foote said. With uneven allocation of resources and few outspoken allies, Foote became one of the College's loudest voices clamoring for greater equity in athletics.

"I did feel like in some ways I was representing all female athletes and had to be their voice," she said. "Those were not great days for women being recognized for what they could contribute to athletics."

For Foote, the logic was simple: "Why would a parent pay the same tuition for their son and daughter to go to Middlebury and their son has all these opportunities to be coached by someone who knows what they're doing, to have a bus to drive to games, great practice hours, great practice facilities and a locker room and their daughter has none or very little of that?"

Following Foote's persistent petitions and the actions of a group of courageous students, including Megan Kemp '88 and Ingrid Punderson '88, who filibustered in front of the Board of Trustees, the administration caved and began more equitably allocating its resources to align with Title IX standards.

The change in approach proved to be a turning point both for women's athletics at Middlebury and, by extension, Foote, whose role in the department more closely mirror those of male head coaches in the aftermath.

"My career sort of has had the same changes that others' careers have gone through," she said. "When most men were coaching one sport, I decided I wanted to coach just one sport and I chose to coach lacrosse because there's more strategy in the sport."

When I stepped into Missy Foote's office for the first time as a junior, my attention was immediately drawn to the mosaic of plaques and photos that adorn virtually every inch of wall space. Place one more precariously on the wall, it seemed to me, and the entire structure might come crashing down on the bantam woman perched in the corner on a black swivel chair. My thoughts about the wall decorations fluttered away, however, when I met Foote's shrill gaze. This was *Missy Foote*, who seemed to inspire reverence and recoil in equal measure. Then, I didn't know that she had almost 400 career wins and had won five Regional Coach

ENVISIONING SUCCESS
One of Foote's time-old rituals is to have her players close their eyes in the lead up to a game and picture what will happen on the field.

THROUGH THE AGES
From her earliest years of coaching on Battell field (bottom) to 2014 in the locker room (top), Missy has, at least in stance, remained consistent.

of the Year awards — and would go on to win two more. Then, I thought she was a past-her-prime coach, whose legacy allowed her to continue coaching beyond the natural scope of her career. Then, I suspected she was beloved by her former players, but that a generational divide had alienated the soon-to-be Hall of Fame coach from her current team.

Sue Lehman (née Butler) '81 was a member of the freshman class that matriculated to Middlebury with Foote. Though separated from her coach by just a couple of years, Lehman and her teammates quickly fell in line behind their elder stateswoman, who to them represented the changing landscape in athletics.

"We were all very excited to have some new blood in the women's athletic program," Lehman said. "It was right at the beginning of people taking women's sports seriously and Missy represented that for me."

"If we were willing to commit to her, she was there and she was going to take that program as far as we as athletes were willing to go with it," Lehman continued. "She was not going to be a limiting factor — she was going to pull us all up because she had really high standards for herself and for us."

But while Foote's drive garnered the respect of her players immediately, it was the marriage of her fierce intensity and energetic approach that Lehman and others came to love.

"You wanted to do a good job for her, and part of that was because she also made it fun," Lehman said. "The fact that she can get the intensity out of people at the same time as keeping it fun and lighthearted … is one of the signs of an incredible coach and person."

As Foote's coaching career progressed, it mirrored the evolutions in her personal life that took place separate from, but always in close proximity to, the team. When she celebrated the birth of her two children in the mid-eighties, Foote recognized a new opportunity to provide guidance for her players.

"When my children were small I was the role model of how to be a working mother, which was sort of a new thing in that era," she said. "What did women do when they had small children? Did they continue to work? And how did they do it? My children were a part of our team and those players got to know my children well."

Foote's life informed the realities of her players, who recognized their coach as far more than just that.

"[Missy] is a coach, and that's such a big part of who she is, but she's more than that," Allen said. "She's a friend, she's a mentor, she's a daughter, she's a mother, she's a wife."

Whatever her players say about her as a person, Foote's accomplishments on the field cannot be overlooked. Allen, who is a member of the vaunted class of '99, captured two national championships under Foote, including an undefeated season in 1997 that sparked a run of five national championships over an eight-year span, part of a streak of 14 consecutive Final Four appearances for Foote's program. Between 2001 and 2003 the women's lacrosse team won 51 straight games and Foote was named NESCAC Coach of the Year five consecutive years.

"The thing about winning a national championship is that it's incredibly addicting," Foote said. "At the end of every season, and I think any coach will tell you this, they're absolutely exhausted and every coach probably thinks in the back of their mind, 'Oh my god, I don't know how I keep doing this.' And I've been thinking that since I was 21."

But what happens when an aging coach stops wining national championships?

In the spring of 2007 Foote coached her 14th-straight team to a Final Four. The next two seasons her teams failed to advance beyond the NESCAC semifinals and fell short of the 13-win mark for the first time since the 2000 season. In 2010, the women's lacrosse team went 8-7, failing to make the NESCAC tournament for the first time since its implementation in 2001. Had the final horn sounded unceremoniously on Missy Foote's legendary coaching career?

"The biggest thing is that the game has exploded nationally — there are so many more teams," Allen said. "Kids are starting to play younger so there are lot more talented kids so other teams are successful because they're getting better kids. So that makes it a lot harder today to win a national championship."

Was the proliferation of women's athletics — the very thing that Foote set out to achieve — dooming her on the playing field?

As it turned out, no.

Foote endured the stretch of comparatively underwhelming play by understanding the relative importance of winning while falling back on her humble, but infectious sense of humor.

"Reid Berrien ['08], who played for me for four years, was an assistant coach for me for two or three years," Foote said. "She was at an early game and it was a close game and she was dying on the sidelines. 'How the hell do you do this, how have you done this for so long? I can't do this; I can't stand this!' And I said, 'Reid, there are two things: one, it's just a game; and the second thing is you put your hands in your pockets so that no one can see them shaking."

"MISSY'S BIG MOTTO IS THAT YOU STAND ON THE SHOULDERS OF THOSE WHO CAME BEFORE YOU."
-HEIDI ALLEN '99

"I loved lacrosse, but I didn't think that coaching would ever be something that I did as a job," Berrian said. "But I ended up staying two years to do that, primarily because I thought there was so much I could learn from Missy."

Like many players before her, Berrian became enraptured by Foote's coaching style.

"The natural thing is to say yes to her, if it means helping her out or bettering the team," Berrian said. "She pushes you outside of your comfort zone, but makes you feel kind of comfortable out of it, in a weird way."

While Foote's coaching legacy had been cemented by the relationships she formed with her players, adding two more Final Four runs and collecting Regional Coach of the Year honors the past two seasons did not hurt, either.

"Missy has a lot of the same philosophies and tactics and she's the same person," Allen said. "But she's open to evolving as the sport has, which I don't think you get with all head coaches who have been there as long as she has. Given that there are a couple hundred teams fighting and she's one of four is incredible. She's still at the top of Division III."

Missy met her husband Richard Foote at a Christmas party in 1990, where the stepfather of her children first noticed Missy's "bright, bright light." Over the years, he has become a regular staple of Missy's season-ending banquets where he routinely reads poetry or prose devoted to Missy and her team.

At his wife's New England Lacrosse Hall of Fame induction in 2003, Foote wrote the following:

"My tribute to Missy is this: that she is about as certain as a person can be of her own heart. This is not luck; it is sheer will. It's a conscious choice she makes, the second her head lifts off the pillow each morning, to engage in the world - work hard, play harder, smile, laugh, stay in touch with others, and, above all, pursue wonder wherever it may be hiding. She understands intuitively, that people don't grow old so much as they simply stop being young."

Sixty-one years young, Foote's energy remains boundless, seemingly increasing with age — matched in that regard only by the following of former players she has amassed and the honors and titles she has received.

"I flew back to Baltimore for her Hall of Fame induction [in 2012] and we outnumbered every coach's players by like 50," Berrian recalled. "People flew from California and Colorado and that's such an amazing testament to what she has built."

"I'D ALWAYS LOVE TO WIN ANOTHER NATIONAL CHAMPIONSHIP"
-MISSY FOOTE

"It was just incredible … I think there were six or seven people inducted during the ceremony when Missy was inducted and she had by far the biggest fan base and the loudest cheering," Lehman said. "She just brings everybody along with her; no one ever drops off. She's been building this group for 35 years. Once you're a part of that team she does continue to be your coach, there's no question about it."

Thirty-seven years ago when Foote accepted Middlebury's offer, she never intended to be a lifelong coach.

"I used to say back in the day, 'I'm not going to be a 40-year-old coach,' and here I am, a 60-year-old coach," Foote remarked, with a small laugh.

But then, many of the changes that Foote would oversee during her 37-year coaching career at Middlebury were unimaginable to her in 1977.

"I couldn't even have imagined the title [Senior Woman Administrator], much less me doing it," she said. "Although I guess in some ways I felt like I represented all women athletes on campus as well as our small female coaching staff, of which there were three of us."

So what remains left for Foote to accomplish?

"I'd always love to win another national championship," Foote mused.

When I push her further about how she will know when it is time to retire, Foote tells me that when legendary ski coach Terry Aldrich retired, Director of Athletics Erin Quinn encouraged her to move out of her office and into Aldrich's vacated space.

"I couldn't do it," Foote says, her eyes bright. "I felt like I was retiring. I couldn't go through picture by picture and decide what to keep and what not to keep. So I guess when I think I'm ready to clean out my files and sort through the pictures, that's when I know I'll be ready."

But more so than reaching the summit of her sport once more, Foote remains invigorated by the daily routine of being Middlebury's women's lacrosse coach.

"It's still too intriguing to me and I feel like I still have a lot to offer," she says. "And I still love it; the best part of my day is walking out on that field, absolutely. I always go out the door, through the snow bank out to the field and the team is on the [far] end of the field. Walking out there I get the view of the team and the mountains and the gray and it's starting to be green and I always say, 'Wow, this is great.'"

"Every coach probably thinks in the back of their mind 'Oh my god, I don't know how I keep doing this.' And I've been thinking that since I was 21."
-MISSY FOOTE

THE TEAM AFTER DARK

BY FRITZ PARKER | PHOTOS BY RACHEL FRANK

It is Saturday night in Battell Hall, and the same thing seems to be on everyone's mind. Beyond the door-slamming and hallway-shuffling, the thumping bass providing a steady murmur that echoes through the halls, you can hear the same four words repeated as people pass each other in the hall."What's going on tonight?"

If you were an outsider to our campus, the answers you hear might surprise you. 'Men's soccer' or 'rugby' is as likely a response as the name of any Greek-lettered organization. You'll probably hear 'Frisbee' or 'football' as often as the name of any social house or local bar. Of course, to most of us Middlebury students, this system is not only all too familiar, but relatively unquestioned.

As long as any of us have been here, the various athletic groups on campus have served as a sort of unsanctioned social backbone of the school, alongside – and at times competing with – the College's four official social houses. The thought that this system is unusual or even worthy of second thought emerges only when you compare Middlebury to other colleges, particularly ones at which social life revolves around a core of long-established Greek houses or perhaps a vibrant local bar scene.

But how did we get to this place, with sports teams seeming to function as both athletic groups for their members and social venues for anyone who cares to show up? And how does this system impact our teams and their ability to remain competitive – whether it be on the field, in the pool or on the slopes?

"HE'S ON RUGBY"

Across all sports, Middlebury athletes are generally identified by their team. In our community, saying 'he plays squash' or 'she's on the Frisbee team' usually does the job in terms of identifying individuals, often more effectively than that person's name or a five-second description of their appearance would. This

phenomenon certainly isn't unique to Middlebury, but the relative smallness of our student body and general sense of engagement amongst students here can certainly be seen as magnifying the need for group identification. Of course this need can be met through participation in virtually any activity outside the classroom – volunteer work, journalism, student activism – but it is hard to find any groups that are as recognizable and subscribed-to as the athletic teams.

For some new first-years, finding a group means walking-on to a varsity athletic team, a prospect that can be contingent on roster spots opening up, and often on coaches cutting recruited players.

"Middlebury didn't recruit me to play," said men's soccer tri-captain Sam Peisch '13.5. "When I applied, I got in as a Feb, and so I knew that if I were going to play I would have to walk-on. If I could play, I definitely wanted to, so I worked pretty hard to do that. When I got here in the winter, I met with Coach Saward and he told me, 'I can't guarantee you a spot on the team.'"

For those who make the cut, said Peisch, the uncertainty can be worthwhile.

"They were really, really welcoming, and I kind of molded myself onto the team. People help each other out with stuff at home, helping people find classes and professors, just generally helping each other out," said Peisch.

More often, however, the prospect of walking-on is too much for most first-years, many of whom turn to club sports in order to find their niche on campus. These clubs – particularly Frisbee and men's rugby – have large, open memberships that allow them to entice potential members with the social benefits of an athletic team, without the necessary commitment of a varsity program.

"It can be hard for freshmen to make friends at college, and a lot of people look for ways to get into a social group," said Jeff Hetzel '14, co-captain of the ultimate Frisbee team. "I think that the Frisbee team has really found something in the overlapping benefits of getting a sizeable team and getting good athletes to come to the team by providing a social group, and an environment for meeting new people and also welcoming and introducing people to the sport."

Club sports are a particularly attractive option for former high-school athletes who find themselves outside the athletic fold upon arriving at Middlebury.

"Whereas fraternities run the social scene at other schools, it's kind of the sports teams here, so I found myself pulled into another group."
-SAM SCHWARZ '16

"Soccer was my main sport in high school, and I was captain of the team my senior fall," said men's rugby co-captain Allan Stafford '13.5. "I thought about playing here, and I talked to the coach a bit, but when I got here, I got in as a Feb and that kind of killed it."

For the men's rugby team, this tactic has extended to recruiting former members of the College's varsity programs into their ranks – an approach through which they have attracted many of their current members.

"We have a lot of guys who were originally recruited for other sports: football, lacrosse, whatever it is," said Stafford. "Some people just didn't like the dynamics of the team they were a part of, for whatever reason. Because rugby is a club it's very open and we accept everyone."

Because the sport remains relatively rare at the high-school level, the rugby club leans heavily upon its ability to draw new players to the sport in order to fill its roster and remain competitive.

"People come from a varied background," said Stafford. "I'd say that, among the starters, maybe half played some kind of rugby in high school."

The frisbee and men's rugby clubs have thrived under this model: providing the social benefits of an athletic team without all of the rigors inherent in a varsity program. With the clubs' fluid memberships, new members come for the social benefits but often stay once they have become familiar with the sport and the team.

"We definitely party, but it should never be the focus. With kids who very clearly care a lot about partying and want that to be the focus, we definitely try hard to knock that down a bit. That doesn't get you anywhere individually and it doesn't get the team anywhere collectively. There's a lot more to college and the lifestyle than just getting hammered on a Saturday night."

-SAM PEISCH '13.5

"Our team gatherings are pretty natural," said Stafford. "You eventually become very comfortable with the people you play rugby with. In the fall, it's 100 percent of my social scene."

"It's been really important to the Frisbee team to have the social element, to keep people in the program and invite people into the game," said Hetzel. "It's something that might appear from afar to conflict with the competitive aspect, but the success of the Frisbee team is very closely related to the social element."

"THEY'RE KIND OF LIKE FRATS"

When it comes to describing the social function of sports teams at Middlebury to those unfamiliar with the College, these words are often where people start. On some level this seems like a bit of a cheap comparison: the primary focus of our athletic teams is of course their on-field performances, and the qualifications for joining are generally athletic, not social, in nature. These points are the only reasons that the athletic teams – along with several singing groups – escaped the college's 1990 ban on single-sex social organizations, but the evolving role of the athletic teams since then has blurred the distinction considerably. So where is the line between the athletic and social function of these teams, and how does that function fit into Middlebury's history of Greek life?

For most of the College's history, however, these groups existed side-by-side, often with overlapping memberships.

"I played on the football team all four years," said John Lyons '82, who returned to Middlebury years after his graduation for a stint as an assistant football coach. "And, yes, I was in DU [Delta Upsilon]."

For Lyons and other Middlebury men of his era – the College never fully embraced the sorority model – involvement in fraternities was an attractive option for building a social life on campus, and one that did not exclude participation in varsity athletics.

"The best friends I ever made were on the football team at Middlebury," he said. "My experience is that it was a pretty diverse group of guys. There was a core of guys who were very close, many of them in the fraternity, but there wasn't a sense of exclusivity. I knew a lot of people who wrote for the newspaper and other things."

In fact, the fraternities were an essential part of the experience for many of Middlebury's male athletes. Because of the immense popularity and influence of Greek organizations on campus social life, these young men often joined fraternities as a way to provide a social proxy for the same groups that they were playing alongside on the athletic fields.

"There were two fraternities that were dominated by football, lacrosse and hockey," said Lyons. "There was no conflict. I had a lot of friends and some teammates in different fraternities, like [Kappa Delta Rho] and others. One thing to dispel is that rush and all the business was very important: there was no process of competition, with people being given the thumbs-up or thumbs-down."

Under this system, the athletic teams were just that. Unlike today – when groups of all sorts aim to provide social venues for their members – weekend nights fell squarely into the milieu of the fraternities.

"The football team had an annual party, but it was with the coaches and you had to have a date," said Lyons. "Parties and all that were pretty much fraternity-based. The golf team would never get together and say, 'Let's have a bash.' It was all through the fraternities."

There are of course several reasons for the drastic shift over the past 20 years in how teams operate socially, not the least of which being the raising of the drinking age from 18 to 21, which placed college administrations all around the country in murky legal territory in terms of sanctioning campus social life. At Middlebury, it seems to be the athletic teams that have taken up much of the slack in filling social roles previously held by the fraternities: providing social outlets, party venues and opportunities for first-years to get to know upperclassmen.

"Whereas fraternities run the social scene at other schools, it's kind of the sports teams here, so I found myself pulled into another group," said Sam Schwarz '16, a member of the men's rugby team. "The social scene beyond it, getting to know upperclassmen, it made the whole transition to freshman year very easy for me."

"DO YOU RAGE?"

At this point, the fraternities have been banned for over 20 years, and most of Middlebury's peer institutions have similarly tried to wash their hands of what they viewed as troublesome Greek life. This larger movement has created a generation of liberal-arts students who often arrive on campus with a notion of what sports teams are like that differs wildly from what existed during their parents' era.

"Coming out of high school, a lot of kids have this expectation that college is just this huge party," said Peisch. "Recruits ask certainly, 'What are parties like?' and 'Do you rage?'"

According to Peisch, trying to downplay the importance of the social side of athletic life is paramount in creating a healthy team culture.

"I mean we definitely party, but it should never be the focus. With kids who very clearly care a lot about partying and want that to be the focus, we definitely try hard to knock that idea down a bit. That doesn't get you anywhere individually and it doesn't get the team anywhere collectively. There's a lot more to college and the lifestyle than just getting hammered on a Saturday night."

Some teams struggle to do this, skewing the tenuous balance between these social and athletic functions, causing a team to struggle athletically.

"I think the focus and commitment wasn't as good in earlier years, and even in my freshman year," said men's basketball assistant coach Kyle Dudley '09, who arrived at Middlebury to a basketball team that had finished 6-18 the year before.

After a disappointing 12-12 finish during his first year – a team whose roster included just one senior – Dudley and his teammates committed to changing the off-the-court culture of the team in order to build a more competitive program.

"I think some people differ as to whether off-the-court chemistry leads to on-the-court chemistry, but I'm someone who definitely believes that," said Dudley. "We developed the kind of relationships where went to practice and battled for

playing time, but as soon as we walked off the court we were great friends again. I think it's very difficult to establish a culture like that. Just talking to people from other programs and other times in our program, they didn't have a culture like that."

Taking this approach, the team improved its record over each of Dudley's four years, culminating in a 24-4 senior campaign which saw the Panthers take home the 2009 NESCAC championship while making a second straight NCAA appearance – beginning a streak that still continues.

"I'm a little bit jealous just for the fact that the guys now get to have four great years, four years of being top-25 and having a shot at NCAAs," he said. "I had two great years, but I think it means a lot that we had something that was coming from the bottom and we brought it to the top."

As Peisch says, this process of balancing priorities – academic, social and athletic – should be at the core of the college athletic experience.

"For me, I really want people to be more than just soccer players," he said. "It gets back to the whole ethic of being a student-athlete. Just because you're an athlete, you shouldn't feel any degree of entitlement."

While agreeing that social life is an important part of his ideal experience – particularly at a college which largely depends upon its athletic teams as social outlets – Peisch was adamant that it should not exist on its own, but rather as an extension of a positive team environment that engages teammates on a range of levels.

"I think one of the things that is super important is that the kids maintain a sense of perspective. Parties are certainly part of it, but I think the most important time for building that atmosphere is before and after practice."

"The Frisbee team has really found something in the overlapping benefits of getting a sizeable team and getting good athletes to come to the team by providing a social group.
-JEFF HETZEL '14

DALLAS
5

THE CONCUSSION DIARIES

BY KYLE FINCK | PHOTOS BY ANTHEA VIRAGH

It was a one-in-a-million chance or a message from God. In Nov. 2008, Sierra Stites '14 was standing on the sidelines watching her high school soccer team play. Then, a ball kicked from an adjacent field slammed into her head, whipping her skull forward and forever changing her life.

"My original thought was 'what did I do wrong?' But that got me into religion and sinning, and I never felt comfortable with that thought because once you start thinking like that it can lead you down a very dangerous path, and I was already in a precarious position," she told me, reflecting five years after the concussion.

On that day, she was not playing specifically to avoid worsening the "standard" concussion she sustained after butting heads with an opponent for a jump ball two weeks earlier in a tournament in St. Louis, Mo. The second concussion could not have come at a worse time. In the midst of the junior year rat race to get into top colleges, her test scores plummeted from the 90th percentile to the 30th percentile. Stites was forced to complete speech cognitive therapy to help her regain understanding of what was happening in class.

"I never took that much time off of school, because I defined myself as a student-athlete, and I already had the athlete part taken away," Stites said. "I ended up having autonomic injuries as well, which meant that any change of planes – getting up, lying down – would make me really dizzy with black spots in vision."

Stites had battled back from two torn ACLs – rehab she now calls "easy" in comparison – but that second concussion became an immovable obstacle, strapping her with physical and emotional baggage she was

WAKING UP
After 72 hours in the Intensive Care Unit of Fletcher Allen Hospital in Burlington, Kitchen opened her eyes for the first time, posing with her older sister Zoe three days after the accident.

> "YOU'RE LOCKED IN A PRISON, AND IF SOMEONE TELLS YOU OTHERWISE, THEN THEY HAVEN'T DONE IT."
> -EMMA KITCHEN '14.5

forced to carry with her to Middlebury.

The step from high school to college was especially challenging because Stites lost the direct support from her family. One of the biggest challenges for victims of head injuries is that there are no physical manifestations. Without a cast or crutches, a blinding headache is easily seen as lethargy or even laziness by the outside world.

"I had a friend tell me 'you were moping there for a while'. Are you serious? I couldn't think. That was always disappointing to hear but it tells you who your real friends are. But comments like that are why I retreated into my family because my parents were both doctors and knew, at least medically, what I was going through. The stigma is definitely there, but I stopped caring what people thought."

While the College's administration and counseling services gave her constant support, Stites struggled to overcome what at times seemed an unwinnable war. During the fall of her sophomore year, Stites' recovery hit a plateau, her symptoms neither improving or worsening and the constant headache hurting her ability to concentrate. Running out of options, Stites and her father found themselves at the Famed Mayo Clinic in Rochester, Minn. More physical therapy and a semester later, she returned to the College.

During her junior year, the physical symptoms subsided enough that she could stay up past 10 p.m. and drink in moderation, things most students take for granted. But that was only half the battle.

"Part of post-concussion syndrome is the emotional side affects. I struggled with depression and anxiety junior year because I had a lot of trouble finding the support that I needed. I was never someone to tell everyone what I was feeling, and so I had a lot of trouble re-adjusting junior year and by the end I was almost ready to leave Middlebury."

Even thought she has lived a quarter of her life with a concussion and cannot remember most of high school, Stites still plans on becoming a doctor after graduation and even gives her head injury credit.

"It's made me a better person and made me more self-aware. People come to college saying they are going to find themselves, and I think I came in knowing who I was and what I'm about. It forced me to grow up quickly and take a hard look at things. I don't think I would even be at Middlebury if I didn't have a head injury. It's been a part of my life for so long that I can't imagine what it would be like without it."

A THREE MONTH HEADACHE

Possibly the cruelest part of concussions for athletes is the recovery. People who shape their lives around movement in sport are forced into static solitude, something they are wholly unaccustomed to.

With five minutes left in a weekday lacrosse practice on April 17, 2013, John Montgomery '14 scooped up a ground ball in front of the net and ran up the field. But a teammates' stick jarred it loose, and as he jumped to retrieve it, the two players' heads collided. He blacked-out on contact and blacked-in when he hit the ground, beginning a dizzying five-month journey of doctors, darkness, and frustration.

Montgomery had sustained a concussion playing high school football at St. Mark's School in Dallas, Texas. While he was "so mentally out-of-it it wasn't even funny" at the time of the hit, he went back to class within four days of being hit and simply sat out a few weeks. But this one was different.

"I heard horror stories about it, and I'd seen other people get concussions, but I had sustained one, I knew what that's like, they must have been doing something wrong."

The day after the initial hit on Youngman Field at Alumni Stadium, Montgomery didn't feel any of the telltale signs of a concussion – blinding headaches or nausea – only a self-described "foggy-headedness." After consulting with Associate Director of Sports Medicine Kelly Cray, he suited up for practice the next day. While it was supposed to be a non-contact practice, Montgomery ran into a pick from another teammate, hitting the same side of his head for a second time in as many days.

Montgomery was hindered by the fact that the second concussion was not cut and dry. In those crucial five days between the initial hit and the following Monday when he finally shut everything down – now known to be the most important in dictating recovery time – Montgomery most likely exacerbated the concussion.

"When I tell this story, I feel like an idiot because I kept going and going and going. Part of it was that I didn't know I was hurt, and I had so much schoolwork I needed to do. I couldn't just sit there and be like, 'oh well, I got hit in lacrosse, so that's why I can't write your paper, Professor.' Doing work was probably the thing that pushed me over the edge. You wouldn't ask someone who just broke their leg to go run a marathon. So translating that comparison to a concussion, you wouldn't ask that person to run a marathon mentally, doing a bunch of schoolwork and writing a bunch of papers. And that's exactly what I did. It was stupid."

As the warmer months crept onto the College, Montgomery was bed-ridden, spending 16 hours a day staring at the dark ceiling. All stimulation was forbidden, which in essence, is almost everything. The only contact he had with the outside world was texting friends to bring him meals. After three weeks of darkness in Starr 311 and little progress, Montgomery decided to take incompletes in all four of his classes and fly home to Dallas with the help of his mother. Once home, he went through an array of doctors from a chiropractor to a neurosurgeon, even spending hours in a hyperbaric chamber.

It took the headache and accompanying symptoms three months to fully subside, after which he finished his class work and completed a truncated internship in Houston, Texas.

The bravest, or most foolhardy, part of the story is that Montgomery plans to play lacrosse this coming year.

"It's a large gamble. I already have a job after I graduate and I would hate to have that taken away from me because of my decision, but at the same time, when you fall off a horse, you always get back on to show yourself and the horse that you can do it, and I don't see how this situation is any different."

A CONCUSSION SPEAKS

If you talk to enough athletes who have sustained concussions, you start to notice a common trend. While few can remember the crucial moments – many black out – every one I talked to can remember the exact date and time of day they were concussed, even years later. The odd paradox speaks to the unintended consequences and importance a concussion has.

For ex-skier Emma Kitchen '14.5, that was just after dark on Dec. 1, 2010. On her bike, bombing down the hill on College Street below St. Mary's Church, Kitchen collided head on with another student at the intersection with Shannon Street. The impact left her in the intensive care unit for three days with a fractured skull, hemorrhaging, and cerebral contusions that kept her bed-ridden with no screens for six months.

Kitchen's recovery came in meager steps. At six months, she was able to get her heart rate above 150 beats per

minute. At eight months, she started drinking with her friends. Finally, after nine months and 11 doctors, she made a full recovery.

The unending days of confined darkness became some of the hardest in her life.

"You're locked in a prison, and if someone tells you otherwise, then they haven't done it. Recognizing that it hurts to live, that's terrible. The problem I had was that I felt like I was lying there for someone else. Everyone from a neurosurgeon to a psychotherapist told me the same thing: 'go lie in a dark room. You'll recover slowly, but we don't know when.' It was really frustrating in that regard. There was nothing else out there. It made me feel like an addict who had done something wrong."

But necessity became the mother of invention. Frustrated with the lack of alternative therapies, Kitchen and Kait Surdoval '12 founded Concussions Speak in Jan. 2012.

"The idea came from me not being able to talk about my concussion. It was just a matter of finding more people like myself, who had gotten their sport taken away from them," Kitchen said.

After Director of Athletics Erin Quinn sent an e-mail petitioning athletes to share their concussion stories, the group received ten stories.

"The similarities between the stories were uncanny. Everyone has a similar story of the denial stage, the depression stage, and then the very slow recovery stage. It is really painful and difficult. I found that I didn't trust anyone who hadn't been through it because it impacts every second of your life. Everyone has the same experience of not feeling 100 percent there. We realized that it was fine to tell these stories, but what we really needed was a way for people to connect, talk about it, and answer questions."

Today, Kitchen said she speaks to a different concussion survivor about once a week. Concussions Speak has grown from a modest Facebook page to full-fledged non-profit, traveling to speaking engagements far beyond the College. Most recently, Kitchen, Stites and Surdoval spoke to a group of kindergarten through 12th grade students Hammond School in South Carolina on Nov. 22.

Reflecting back on her years at the College, Kitchen may be the only athlete who calls her concussion "the best day of my life."

"The ski culture is very insular. You are required to spend so much time with the team because it's such a demanding sport. They are always on the hill,

BEDRIDDEN

Montgomery spent 16 hours a day in bed, relying on friends, acquaintances and even classmates he only met in class to deliver his daily meals.

or preparing to be on the hill. On a time perspective, I would not have had the opportunities to do what I've done since. If I had gotten through half my Middlebury career and then decided I didn't want to ski, there would have been a lot of emotional detachment for letting the team down. I was brought here to ski, and I found them to be a family-oriented bunch, and to let them down like that would be hard on me. I didn't have to go through any of that. The decision was made for me."

CHALLENGING TRADITIONAL TREATMENTS

The high-intensity community that the College is praised for makes treating concussions often a fool's errand. The first five days are the most critical in determining the severity and length of recovery. While the College has a four-step diagnostic process, asking students at the College to push pause on their entire lives is often a task many fine impossible to embrace.

"Another challenge is getting concussed students to slow down and allow their brain to recover. The pressure to keep up with academic work is one of the most significant and detrimental factors impairing recovery from concussion," wrote Medical Director, College Physician and Team Physician Dr. Mark Peluso in an email. "Students that try to push through symptoms to keep up with their academic work tend to require a longer recovery times than students who rest and follow our symptom-based recovery process.

In light of the imperfect treatments and challenging atmosphere for recovery at the College, concussions are not going anywhere. Peluso said that between Parton Health Center and Sports Medicine, he treats between 15 and 30 concussions a year, which is rising nationwide because of better patient reporting.

During the five-day period after Montgomery was initially hit, he did anything but rest, attending class, practicing multiple times, and taking numerous tests. After weeks of bed rest at the College, he decided to go home early, which he called the "best decision" he made over the course of the whole ordeal.

When asked what advice they would give to students who have recently sustained concussions, both Kitchen and Montgomery were critical of the bed rest treatment program.

"Past a certain point it actually works against you. I told my parents that I didn't think I would ever have this much time to sit and think unless I went to prison in solitary confinement. You just sit there and think, 'do I have a headache? Do I have a headache?' Eventually, you are going to give yourself a headache. I felt like I was starting to go crazy by the end of it," Montgomery said.

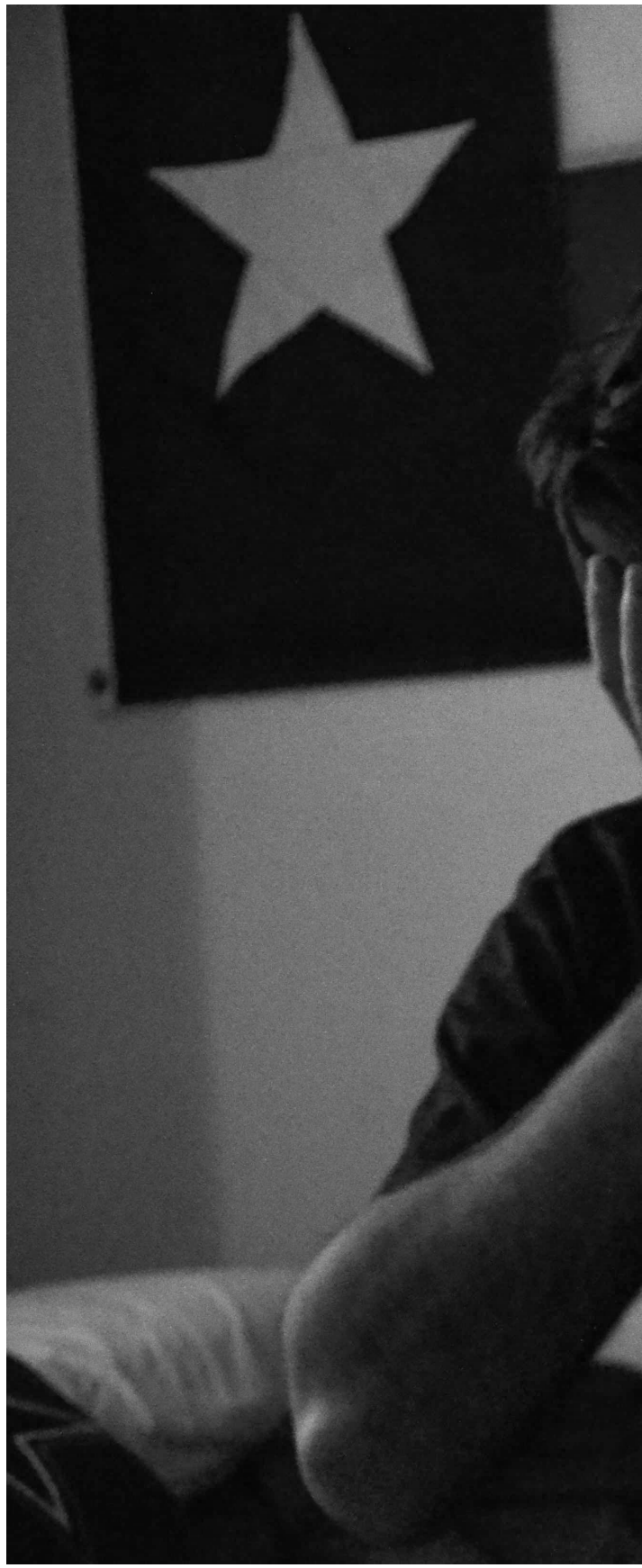
Peluso wrote that to a certain extent, prevailing medical methods of treating concussions are starting to change.

"More recent expert opinion suggests that lying down in a dark room fir several days may not be helpful. The concept is known as sub-symptom threshold recovery, and allows concussed students to gradually increase class attendance and school work activities in small graduated intervals based on symptoms."

Kitchen encouraged people to take recovery into their own hands.

"The part that hurts the most is when you are lying there because someone told you so, in your own prison. Don't let someone tell you cannot go outside," she said.

"YOU WOULDN'T ASK SOMEONE WHO JUST BROKE THEIR LEG TO GO RUN A MARATHON. SO TRANSLATING THAT COMPARISON TO A CONCUSSION, YOU WOULDN'T ASK THAT PERSON TO RUN A MARATHON MENTALLY, DOING A BUNCH OF SCHOOLWORK AND WRITING A BUNCH OF PAPERS. AND THAT'S EXACTLY WHAT I DID. IT WAS STUPID."
-JOHN MONTGOMERY '14



DANGEROUS DECISIONS
Despite warnings form friends, family and doctors, Montgomery plans on suiting up for his senior year of lacrosse.

THE RISE OF

BY OWEN TEACH
PHOTOS BY PAUL GERARD

Not every team would begin its season-ending banquet with a skit involving one of its players' use of SnapChat and then follow that up with several spontaneous, borderline bizarre dance routines throughout the night, but the Middlebury College Rugby Club (MCRC) has a knack for writing its own script both on and off the field. From a Division II club competing against mid-level schools just three years ago, the MCRC has forged a unique path through the ranks of collegiate rugby, rising up the ranks to the 19th-ranked team in Division I while claiming back-to-back East Coast Rugby Conference (ECRC) championships. As a student organization with minimal outside recruiting presence, the MCRC has developed its own brand, both on campus and, increasingly, across the country and world, making it an attractive place for top-level students to play the game at an elite level. Despite its designation as a club sport, the MCRC's devoted coaching staff and playing core, increasing presence on campus and national notoriety all have the "Blue" — as Head Coach John Phillips has dubbed it — on the up.
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THE RISE

Phillips came to Middlebury in the fall of 2008, the year following the club's first Division II National Championship in 2007. Fly half and former captain Brian Sirkia '12.5 then joined the team the next semester for the team's second D-II National Championship run in three years, when the MCRC defeated Wisconsin 27-11 in the spring of 2009.

Sirkia, who played organized rugby in his native Vancouver during high school, wondered if the MCRC had reached its peak as a D-II program.

"When I got there I wondered, 'Is this our ceiling – competing for a D-II Championship each year?'" Sirkia said. "Especially as a small club in Vermont who can't recruit rugby players, should we be happy with this?"

It is not that the club had not been successful — far from it. Between 1997 and 2010, the MCRC recorded 13 consecutive undefeated regular seasons as a D-II team, including 10 New England championships and four northeast regional championships.

The short answer to Sirkia's question, however, turned out to be no.

The club reached the D-II national tournament in each of the next two seasons, narrowly losing to the University of Wisconsin-Whitewater in the 2011 title game. In the fall of that year, the club played its first Division I season in the ECRC and, despite going 3-3, won the conference the following fall with a 5-1 record to advance to its first national tournament in Spring 2013.

"I think the National Championship in 2007 kick started a feedback loop where we got more players and even more success," Sirkia said. "Where we end up is not in D-II, but competing for championships in Division I. We are still continuing to grow and there's no clear ceiling about how the team can perform."

AN AUTUMN TO REMEMBER

By all accounts, the fall of 2013 marked a new chapter in the history of Middlebury men's rugby. The Blue finished its third season in Division I rugby as undefeated ECRC champions by going 6-0 in a dominant regular season. The A side won every game by at least 16 points, scoring a whopping 231 more points than its opponents in just six regular season games.

The fall was also marked by a slew of individual accolades. The MCRC boasted the conference's top point and try scorer in center Jake Feury '16, a player who also received ECRC first all-conference team honors along with four other teammates.

In the national playoffs, the MCRC walloped Stony Brook University 57-3 in the quarterfinals to secure a memorable home semifinal match against Penn State in front of a home crowd of over 1,000 fans. Despite holding the Nittany Lions, a traditional rugby powerhouse, to a halftime score of 12-12, the big cats from the south pulled away in the second half to down MCRC 34-12.

For Assistant Coach Ben Wells, the final score could have mattered less.

"There were a few times that day when I just turned around and looked at the crowd and could just feel the energy," he remembered. "Penn State, who is one of the elite rugby teams in this country, said they had never played in front of a crowd like that. People who were down at men's soccer said they knew when we scored because they felt the roar come through the ground and hit like a wave. That's cool."

Phillips had similarly vivid memories of the day.

"I remember when we scored and I heard the roar. I turned to one of the coaches and I said, 'I don't care what happens now because we've proven ourselves. We belong. To do that in front of the school was amazing," he said. That was our product — the players and the coaches. That was better than the [2009] national championship, for me. I knew we were going to win that. Here, I didn't know what to expect."

The sublime nature of the day was not lost on Phillips, whose poem he wrote after the game and later recited at the team's banquet, "The Pubs ran dry at Midd" — inspired, he says, by the Welsh poet Max Boyce — begins to sum up the momentous occasion.

"The stores were closed like Sunday/and the streets were very still/and those who chose to stay away/were either dead or very ill," Phillips wrote. "I'll tell my great grandchildren/that their granddad was there/and they'll ask to hear the story of that bright November day/when I went down to the College/and saw Penn State and Middlebury play."

How did the MCRC, a club sport, get to this moment worth a thousand fans and a ballad for the ages? A look into the club's inner workings might provide some answers.

WALKING A FINE LINE

The MCRC's transformation into one of college rugby's elite teams did not happen overnight, but over time and without the funding and recruiting pull of a varsity program, the club's rapid ascent is still something at which to marvel. MCRC members argue, however, that its designation as a club sport creates a culture that inspires success from within.

"You get as much out of it as you put into it," co-captain Allan Stafford '13.5 said. "With every varsity level sport, there is a very high minimum level of commitment for everyone involved. With rugby, if you want to be an A-side member you have to come to practice much like a varsity team. If you want to be athletic and go hit some people while being a member socially, it's much more inclusive in that sense."

Charlie Kunze '15, the team's lock and former member of the football team, also spoke about the differences between the club and varsity structures.

"MCRC has to put a lot of effort into recruiting on campus and we have to sell ourselves as being a tight knit group," he said. "A lot of the reason we are so successful is that we put together this united front, and because of that we were able to get 15 or 20 first-years this fall who came out pretty regularly, which is astounding. You are wholeheartedly choosing to be a part of it. If you don't want to practice then don't come."

In co-captain Ben Stasiuk's '13.5 opinion, Middlebury's caliber of students and international flavor also contribute to MCRC's success.

"The international presence is strong on the team," Stasiuk said. "For example, Ross Berriman '12 taught us how to poach which was huge. The international guys, and increasingly the domestic players as well, set a high bar that leads to our success."

The club also doesn't turn any potential members away and many players claim this emphasis on openness and inclusiveness to be the engine driving the MCRC. If a member wants to join the MCRC, there is always a role.

"If you asked people in [the athletics department] what the worst part of their jobs is they would say making cuts," Wells said. "The times we have to make cuts are when we are selecting for a game or a national trip and it's terrible. I think we're a more valuable organization on campus because there are roles for anyone who wants one. You have guys like [Stasiuk] and [Stafford] who are multi-year starters and earning all sorts of personal accolades. You also have guys who are 5'5" and 150 pounds and not that athletic, but are just as valuable to the club."

Even those who can't make it onto the A side starting 15 want to stick around.

"I know that I am not the most skilled guy out there and I definitely don't belong on the starting side," said B-side scrum half Steve McKenna '13.5. "I have never started an A-Side match – but at the same time I consider myself part of the rugby team and a rugby player."

Former players like Dave Stillman '14 and Dusty Attwood-Dupont '13.5, the club's president and most recent recipient of the Evan Mangino award for exemplary service to the club, continue to strut the sidelines during matches even after injury keeps them off the field.

"One thing that helps us to do that as well is when former players continue coaching, like Dusty or Dave," Sirkia said. "I think that's a pretty unique thing for someone to get injured playing a sport and rather than stopping, continuing to come out and even coach the team. That helps for developing new players and allowing everyone at practice to get attention."

While the club's structure and culture contribute to its success, the MCRC has had to blaze its own path in just about every other aspect of its operations. Perhaps the most significant of these is balancing the inclusive aspect of the club with delivering an elite on-field product.

"The club structure also creates challenges because it can be difficult to maintain the family structure while at the same time promoting a varsity sport attitude," Stasiuk said. "Within the rugby team, I wouldn't say there is a divided sense of commitment, but if you are an A-side player you have to be just as committed as a varsity athlete at this school. Maybe even more so, because we have to do all of the fundraising, set everything up for ourselves and wash our own sh*t — things that other teams don't have to do."

"The challenge is managing that feeling of being a club of student athletes and being very competitive against the best teams in the country," Sirkia said. "It's a balancing act of having that openness and the competitiveness. That's one the coaches have done a great job of."

This inclusiveness serves one of the club's essential tactics for attracting talent from within Middlebury.

"When you have 50 or 60 guys who start coming out every semester we don't have to do as much recruiting because there are all these awesome athletes at Middlebury, and with our inclusive policy we find them to help the club succeed," Sirkia said.

Recruiting elite talent is another roadblock the MCRC has had to overcome. With conference foe, 20th-ranked American International College, now a varsity program, not to mention most of the teams MCRC would face in national tournaments having varsity designation, the club has to work to attract strong athletes with limited resources and only some sway in admissions decisions. For Wells, the best way to bring in new talent is to keep winning.

"When we advance through a national quarterfinal with a blowout win, as we've done this fall, some high school kid somewhere read that and realized Middlebury was for real," he said. "We played California in a rugby sevens tournament that was streamed online and had a strong performance. A player from Canada watched that game, applied to Middlebury, was accepted and started for us all fall. Being out there and doing well is our biggest recruiting tool. Middlebury is at the top of the pile for kids who want to play high-level rugby and get a great education."

While the club has turned away more potential players for academic reasons than some other varsity teams at Middlebury, the MCRC receives support from the administration in other ways. Most notably, the College manages the club's endowment (begun in 2012) and provides part-time salary for Phillips and Wells.

"The fact that John and I are both paid athletic department employees is a really big deal," Wells said. "I think we're fortunate to have an athletic department and college administration that supports us the way that they do."

Other programs have not been so lucky.

"Looking at Colby rugby, for example, as a program that was shut down by the administration and fighting for survival, we take for granted how much financial help we receive," Stafford said.

Finding elite caliber coaches in Vermont in the first place is also difficult, but the MCRC has a history of attracting devoted personnel.

"It's hard to get experienced rugby coaches to live in a small New England town such as Middlebury," Stafford said. "You can appreciate that the coaches we have — John, Ben and Junior Tuiqere — do it for the love of the game."

Kunze also points out that, because it is a club, the coaches are at the same level of involvement as the players.

"The coaches come off as friends first and coaches second, which is a unique aspect of the club environment," he said. "Certainly we want to win games, but there's something called the "Blue" that comes first. Yes they coach us, but they are also members of the club."

Perhaps the most remarkable aspect of the MCRC, however, is the social aspect of the club off the field. The club promotes three pillars: strength and conditioning, skills and club culture, all of which are emphasized equally.

"There are multiple pillars of rugby and only one of those is playing," McKenna said. "In order to cultivate the kind of man that we want playing for the MCRC, you have to have that social governing of one another. The image that you want to project is something that we really focus on."

One just needs to look at the MCRC's roster to appreciate it is also a diverse group. Rugby is an international game, and as such attracts players from all over.

"It's amazing the broad swath of players that the rugby team takes — you end up with a guy like Cliff Alexander '15 from South Carolina playing alongside a winger from Zimbabwe," Sirkia said.

"The school has many international students here, and a lot of them find their way to rugby," Wells said. "We get guys from literally all over the world and so many of them are so quirky in their own ways. I love getting to know the guys and how different they are."

JET BLUE

With the club now beginning to reel in talented high school rugby players, one can safely assume that the MCRC has solidified its status as a Division I program. Phillips' visions of glory of the club are grand, if not grandiose.

"I think about the future sometimes, when I'm finished coaching, that there's going to be a rugby stadium here and it's going to be named after me," he mused. "Everyone will say, 'we're going down to Phillips stadium' — and Ben Wells is going to be coaching by the way."

Stasiuk has other ideas for the club's more immediate future.

"Why don't we take that piece of sh*t shed that we have there that's infested with mice and bees and then build a new shed called the 'John Phillips' shed?" Stasiuk asked. "Or we could make it a little bigger and call it Phillips clubhouse. All the rugby team could ever ask for is a field with better drainage and better storage space."

"That comes with time," Stafford chimed in. "It's a natural progression that as the program grows and gets more successful, the infrastructure improves."

For right now, however, Phillips is happy with the visible growth of his program during his tenure.

"I got here the fall of 2008 and we moved up in fall 2011," he said. "We're playing Cal-Berkley and Arkansas State. We've got Penn State coming to Middlebury. It all comes back to the caliber of the student that we are coaching. We've come together as coaches and players and we're the right fit."

TEAM RITTE

MIDDLEBURY'S FIRST F

BY

PHOT

ITTER FAMILY

T JOHN WYMAN

OS COURTESY OF THE RITTER FAMILY

If you walk out to Peter Kohn Field this spring to watch a women's lacrosse game, you might see two speedy sisters connect on a no-look pass, bounce in a goal and leap into each other's arms. You could have seen the same sequence unfold four years ago when the two played lacrosse together for Middlebury Union High School.

Katie '15 and Chrissy Ritter '16 are two homegrown Middlebury athletes with a backstory that explains their tremendous talent, coachability and character. Bob Ritter '82, head men's football coach and assistant men's lacrosse coach, met figure skater Sue Ritter (née Parsons) '83 during his senior year at Middlebury. The two athletic parents bestowed unto their children something far more valuable than long legs and fast-twitch muscles: an awareness of how sports fit into a fulfilling life. Katie and Chrissy inspire their teammates with a joy and commitment that reflects the person-first development coaching style of their father.

"All those values you hope to instill in a player, they have absorbed from being around him," Sue said. "It's about how you conduct yourself as a teammate—being accountable, showing up on time, being motivated."

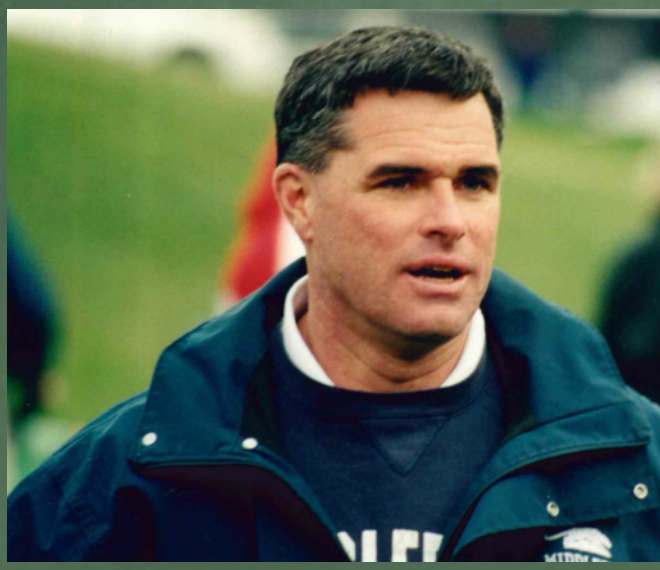
Bob cemented a legend playing football, basketball and baseball in high school in Wachusset, Mass. To this day, his old varsity jackets lie folded in the family basement. At Middlebury, Ritter achieved two-sport stardom for football and a new sport: lacrosse. When he graduated, his football coach hired him immediately as the defensive coordinator. In 1989, he moved to Tufts to become head coach of the men's lacrosse team at Tufts, but six years later he and Sue dropped their Boston-area roots and brought the family to Middlebury for good.

Erin Quinn '86 understands every angle of the competitive, compassionate coaching style of Bob Ritter. Quinn felt the "wrath of Ritter" firsthand 20 years ago as a defensive back for Middlebury football. Years later, they spent late nights "always over Chinese food or Dominoes" strategizing on the blackboard for the Tufts lacrosse team. Erin and Bob danced at each others weddings, and when the Ritters returned to Middlebury in 1996, Erin and Bob coached football and lacrosse together, alternating head coaching roles. The pair even coached middle school lacrosse together for their youngest sons, Bobby Ritter Jr. and Connor Quinn.

"It's a coaching style that you don't need to change at all when you coach your own kid," said Quinn.

Ritters biggest triumph, according to Quinn, is the balance he strikes between coaching to win and coaching to develop his players. "Bob sees the opportunity to use sports to educate the full person, but at the same time he does everything he can to prepare his team to win," Quinn said.

In Bob's office, cheers from the opening

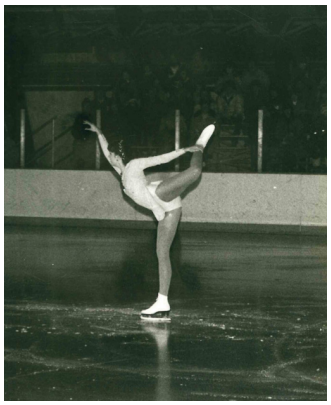


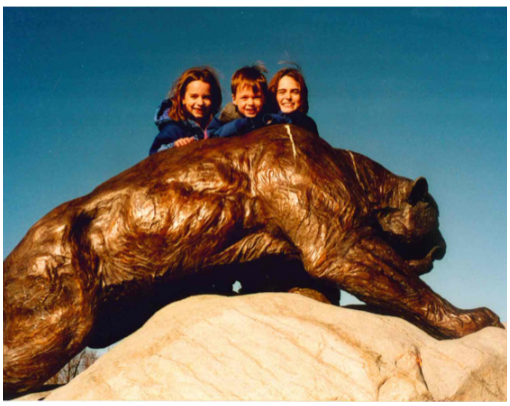
"I HAVE ALWAYS TRIED TO BE MORE OF A FATHER THAN A COACH. THEY ONLY HAVE ONE FATHER AND HOWEVER MANY COACHES. ULTIMATELY, IT HAS TO BE THEIR CHOICE TO PLAY, IT HAS TO COME FROM THEM."

-BOB RITTER

"ALL THOSE VALUES YOU HOPE TO INSTILL IN A PLAYER, THEY HAVE ABSORBED FROM BEING AROUND [THEIR FATHER]. IT'S ABOUT HOW YOU CONDUCT YOURSELF AS A TEAMMATE-BEING ACCOUNTABLE, SHOWING UP ON TIME, BEING MOTIVATED."

-SUE RITTER





minutes of the men's basketball game slipped under the door while Sue flipped through some pictures from the girls' youth. Both are very proud of their daughters' accomplishments, but its clear that sports were never a priority in raising their children.

"I have always tried to be more of a father than a coach," Ritter said. "They only have one father and however many coaches. Ultimately, it has to be their choice to play, it has to come from them."

Sue jumped in the conversation, "I'm the only one who ever says 'Hey, are you keeping up with Missy's packet?'" she laughed, "He just says 'whatever.'"

Amazingly, Sue used to play for Missy Foote, too. Foote saw Sue's height and recruited her to the women's basketball team as a jump-ball specialist.

Sitting thigh-to-thigh on concrete bleachers in Kenyon arena, the two daughters joked about their sports genes.

"Chrissy got all the speed," Katie said.

"Katie definitely got the hands." Chrissy said, cutting off her older sister. Then, with a smile, "she got picked first for everything growing up. I got picked last."

As children, the backyard included full-size basketball courts, a natatorium, and an ice rink. The girls flopped on the big blue pole-vaulting mats with a crew of coaches daughters including future teammates and peers Hannah Quinn '16, Katie Mandigo '16 and Nicole Brown (currently at NYU). They were raised happily by a village of coaches and that was normal.

Katie gravitated naturally toward sports for reasons practical and profound, "I just really liked being active," she said. "Playing team sports I found that you learn things working with 20 girls that you can't learn anywhere else."

While Katie took up every sport but figure skating, Chrissy was the family fashionista and artist.

"Eventually I saw how passionate my sister was about [sports] and how big it was my parents lives," Chrissy said. "So I knew there was something there."

In high school, she finally picked up a stick and used it with as much skill as her paintbrush.

At Middlebury Union High School, the Ritter girls were leagues ahead of their peers in multiple and both won the Dorey Cup for "athletic ability, leadership, scholarship, and moral integrity." Katie earned 12 varsity letters in her career between field hockey, basketball and lacrosse. Three different years she earned first-team all-state honors for lacrosse, and during her final season as basketball captain she became the third player ever at MUHS to surpass 1,000 career points. Chrissy captained her field hockey, basketball and lacrosse teams, earning first-team all-state honors in the two of the three.

Each Ritter sister won a lacrosse state championship alone, but together they lost in the finals twice. The girls appreciated the coaching side of their father during the delicate moments after a loss.

"He would hug us and not say anything," they remembered. "He knows exactly what it feels like, and that we don't want to hear anything."

Their mother Sue, who currently serves as Human Relations Officer in the ADA office at Middlebury, uses that same interpersonal awareness in her job to soothe and rejuvenate troubled students and harassment victims. Teammates testify that this caring spirit did not skip a generation as both Katie and Chrissy fill distinct but important roles on the lacrosse team.

Cat Fowler, the NESCAC Player of the Year in field hockey and a mainstay in the lacrosse starting lineup has a front row seat to the special Ritter dynamic on and off the field.

"They have really different personalities," she said. "Katie is more of a leader on the field and Chrissy more the artsy shopping one. But they are so close and they feed off each other's strengths and help each other through weaknesses.

"Katie is very selfless and fair," said Fowler, "She puts others before herself, and that means more than just not hogging the ball. She just has a very good personality.

"And Chrissy, she is just so fast and plays with such a big heart," she continued. "But she also has the ability to make us laugh. Through the lows Chrissy will find a way to crack a joke and pick you up."

Fowler grew up playing sports with her two older brothers, and she remarked, "If I could have had sisters I think Katie and Chrissy would have been great ones."

"It is a great way to get the team fired up, when Katie and Chrissy go after one another in practice," Foote said. "Everyone picks up on that energy."

Fowler agreed that "We do a lot of one-on-ones in lacrosse, and Katie is never more competitive than when she is going against Chrissy."

The respect beneath the sisters' competitive streak runs both ways. Chrissy admires Katie for the intangibles that motivate her.

"When you watch her play, she has this drive and competitiveness," Chrissy said. "But on the other side you can tell it's not about her. She works so hard and does everything to make her teammates better."

"We are so close in age, I feel like I look up to her as much or more than she does to me," Katie said of her sister. "She is so level-headed, I used to ask her for advice when I was captain for our team in high school."

Katie admits to using Chrissy's eye for fashion tips as well.

"I always ask her about my outfits before any kind of event," she laughed, "She has a much better sense of what goes well, and she's very honest."

Chrissy and Katie recognize another special man and honorary family member who influenced their development as people more than players — Peter Kohn. The namesake for the same field Chrissy and Katie have dominated for years touched the lives of the Ritter family in a personal way.

Bob Ritter first met Kohn in 1981, when Kohn worked in the Middlebury equipment room. Years later, Kohn's love for lacrosse and unique ability to emotionally connect with the players made him an invaluable part of the coaching staff. Anyone who played with Kohn on the sideline never lost sight of the basic human goodness that sometimes gets lost in the heat of competition.

For many years, Kohn insisted on taking the Ritter family out to an annual dinner and he always paid special attention to the children.

"You can order whatever you want," he would coo in their ears.

The girls remember the slower way he spoke and needing to yell into his hearing aids, but to them his handicap was irrelevant. All they noticed was his humor and incredible heart.

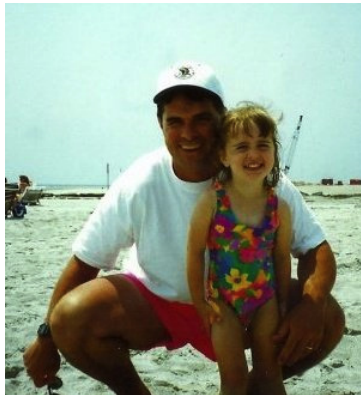
"Getting a hug from Peter was the purest hug you could ever get," said Quinn. "He almost melted in your arms, and you could feel that in that moment all he cared about in the world was you."

Neither girl realized the enormous influence of Peter Kohn in Middlebury sports until they arrived at the College. Foote continues a Keeper of the Kohn tradition, where the team remembers the inspirational stories of the late Kohn.

"Katie and Chrissy, having known Pete as kids, sort of put two and two together," Sue said. "It's come full circle now. They get it… what it means to play on Kohn field."

NCAA playoff runs, NESCAC championships, and high school awards jangle noisily behind Katie, Chrissy and Bob Ritter Sr., but the mark that the family presses on Middlebury bears little to do with pure athletic success. Bob and Sue Ritter extend their influence generously to United Way of Addison County, the town school board and Bob co-chairs the college's Alcohol Task Force. Local youth have called Katie their coach at lacrosse camps and stopped at Chrissy's whistle in the Mary Hogan gym. In the same way that Peter Kohn transcended the sport of lacrosse with his undivided heart and compassion, the Ritter family — Middlebury's First Family — demonstrates a mastery of the challenges and tremendous opportunities for development that sports at the college level can offer.

"CHRISSY GOT ALL THE SPEED."
-KATIE RITTER
"KATIE DEFINITELY GOT THE HANDS."
-CHRISSY RITTER



WATCH THE SERIES AT
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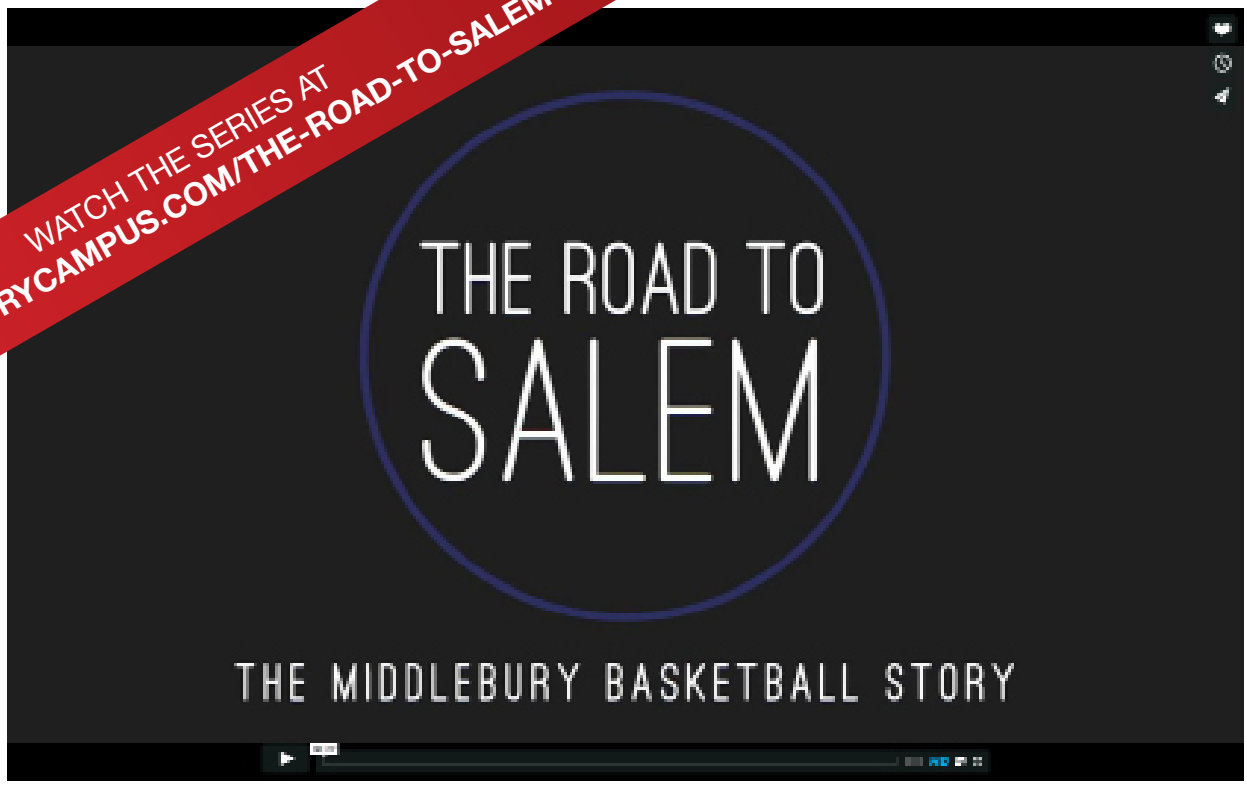
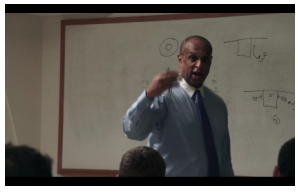


THE ALL-ACCESS, UNVARNISHED, BEHIND-SCENES LOOK AT MIDDLEBURY'S 2013-2014 BASKETBALL TEAM. FOLLOW THE PLAYERS FROM THE DINING HALL TO THE LOCKER ROOM AND OUT THE COURT AT PEPIN GYM AS THEY VIE FOR AN ELUSIVE NATIONAL CHAMPIONSHIP.


PART 1 | JEFF BROWN

PART 2 | THE SENIORS

PART 3 | ALBERT NASCIMENTO

PART 4| LOSING WAYS

PART 5 | STUCK IN REVERSE

COMING ~FEBRUARY 14

PART 6 | THE AMHERST RIVALRY

PART 7 | THE ALL-AMERICAN, JOEY KIZEL

PART 8 | THE NESCAC TOURNAMENT

PART 9 | THE NCAA TOURNAMENT

PART 10 | THE FUTURE, MATT ST. AMOUR

MASTERS OF THE RINK

BY JOE FLAHERTY | PHOTOS BY RACHEL FRANK

The star of a hockey game for some young fans doesn't carry a stick and only rolls out between periods. But for Butch Atkins and Stan Pratt, co-managers of the College's ice rink, driving the iconic Zamboni is no child's play, it's their career and passion. >>

Stan Pratt heard the buzzer and knew exactly what to do. Jumping into the driver's seat of the blue-and-white Zamboni emblazoned with the Middlebury panther, he expertly maneuvered it through Plexiglas gates and onto the ice.

Butch Atkins and Stan Pratt, Co-Managers of the College's ice rink, started working in 1981. During those years, they have seen changes to the venue, starting out in Duke Nelson Arena. They have also experienced their fair share of unusual events, such as the chicken incident.

"That was a hockey game many years ago when someone cut the head off a chicken and threw it on the ice," Pratt said. "That was a bad thing."

Some of their favorite stories are the result of pranks from one Zamboni driver to another.

"I went on the ice one time during a game, the place was packed and as I drove around everyone was waving at me," Pratt said. "And when I got off the ice I saw Butch had put 'Just Married' on the side of the Zamboni."

"He chased me for a while," said Atkins with a chuckle.

Atkins said that there was a fair amount of misbehavior on the part of student employees when he started during the 1980s. "It was always fraternity guys – I didn't find out until years later about some of the things that happened," Atkins said. "The goal judge would know, with two seconds to go, that he could leave, go to the fraternity house, and knew how many beers he could have in time for the next period to start."

Atkins said another time he got onto the Zamboni to do the ice and found the steering wheel missing. "They had taken that and hid it so I had to find that. Or the game would start and our goal judge wasn't there, our timekeeper wasn't there," Atkins said.

According to Atkins, the real improvement came when the rink stopped employing students and looked to the town instead. "Getting people from the town is what makes our rink better than a lot of other rinks because they enjoy what they do, so they put their heart into it," Atkins said.

Keeping the ice maintained, Pratt said, is just as much a team effort as hockey players working together to win a game. "It's not just Butch and I. That's what makes the Middlebury experience special. Time keeper, goal judges, penalty box guys and a couple fans that have been here forever make up the Zamboni crew," Pratt said.

A young kid walked around the corner. "Hi Stan!" he shouted. Pratt smiled and waved. "Kids love the Zamboni," he said.

Suddenly, the buzzer sounded to signal the end of the first period of the junior varsity men's hockey game.

"I've got to do the ice now," Pratt said, and hopped in the driver's seat of the Zamboni and backed up onto the ice.

The strategy, according to Pratt, is to drive the Zamboni in ovals around the rink, starting with the outside and gradually moving in after two laps, as if mowing the lawn. Hot water melts some of the snow and fills in some of the big ruts in the ice. An augur picks up snow and the blade cuts some of the ice. The hot water leaves a smooth surface behind the vehicle.

"There is an elevator that brings [the snow] up the top and shoots it out through a whole at the front of the storage tank," Pratt said.

After arriving back in the makeshift garage near the end of the rink, Pratt pulled into the corner and demonstrated how the Zamboni dumps the snow. With the push of a lever, the snow and ice that had been accumulated from the rink fell from the holding container atop the vehicle into a warm-water pool with a splash.

The tank, measuring six feet by four feet, was completely full of snow after smoothing the ice. "Theoretically, we're taking off as much snow as we put on water every time to keep it about the same. The tank, therefore, is about 200 gallons of water," Pratt said.

The Zamboni, which is electric, is an upgrade to the former diesel and propane Zambonis which used to.

"The Zamboni in town is propane but the new ones are all electric, and they're pretty efficient," Pratt said. "Things don't go wrong with them." The Zamboni owned by the College cost between $80,000 and $90,000.

Pratt emphasized that driving the Zamboni is not much more difficult than driving a car. However, he also mentioned that speed is a factor in how much ice the machine lays down. "There's a fine line there because you can't go too slow because you want it to freeze. You have 12 minutes and you've got to get off to set up before the next period starts," Pratt said. "You go as fast as you can and do as good a job as you can."

Even off the Zamboni, there are complications sometimes. Atkins said that once a loose hose with 120 degree water burned a "V" into the ice during a game.

"A few of the frat guys said, 'What do we do, Butch?' I said, all you can do is pack it with snow. So, I did the ice and when I came off, it was just slush. So I showed the official and asked if we should put a couple cones around it. He said no, since there was only one period to go."

Atkins watched the spot with bated breath the whole period. "Nobody skated through it except for the official one time. He was backing up and he hit that and fell right over backwards," Atkins said.

Atkins added that their job often involves more than just doing the ice. "We're in close contact with coaches and student athletes. Three of my children competed in college sports and so I know what it's like to be thousands of miles away from home. These guys stop down and visit with us all the time."

Pratt said Chip Kenyon '85, whose name adorns the arena, was an ally to the Zamboni drivers.

"We were always part time so the College never gave benefits to part-time people until one of our friends over the years, the guy who has his name over the door out here – he was a freshman the first year we started," Pratt said. "So he had a lot to do with getting us benefits once we moved to the new rink. He's very competitive but he'll do anything for you. He cares about the little guys – he liked the equipment people and people like Butch and I."

ZAMBONI'S PRICE TAG

$85,000

GALLONS THE WATER TANK HOLDS

300

BUTCH AND STAN'S YEARS DRIVING THE ZAMBONI

33

MINUTES THEY HAVE TO SMOOTH THE ICE

12

BEHIND THE VEST

MEET STAN PRATT AND SEE THE ZAMOBNI IN ACTION IN A SPECIAL EDITION OF BEHIND THE VEST AT MIDDLEBURYCAMPUS.COM

AT THE BUZZER

FINAL THOUGHTS FROM THE EDITORS

26 TIMES A YEAR, the Campus reports on Middlebury student-athletes. Nearly every week – from before the leaves turn in September all the way through Dunmore season in May – we write about the successes and failures of our teams, about touchdowns scored, free throws missed, races lost and won. Unlike nearly every other section in the newspaper, however, the sports section does not usually delve into the sort of critical, scrutinizing coverage that would peer into the depths – positive and negative – of the athletic program.

Like any institution, the Middlebury athletic department has its problems, though it would be impossible to know it from reading our section on a weekly basis.

When it comes to academic accountability in athletics, for example, the prevailing attitude is "trust us, we've got it." We think that Middlebury can do better than that. If the moniker student-athlete still rings true, why is the image that we project of our athletes so heavily weighted towards performance on the field?

Across the board, issues like this become easier to overlook when our teams are winning. This is an unfortunate reality of college sports in our time: There is a give-and-take associated with athletic success that can allow issues to fester in even the most prestigious and well-intentioned programs.

And our teams have gotten very good at winning. It is thus incumbent upon all of us – students, fans, journalists and athletes – to ask these hard questions of our athletic department, so that we can be sure that the accomplishments of our athletes are not undercut by shortcomings on other fronts. Middlebury's athletic program is one of the best in the country, and it is important that we scrutinize that success from time to time in order to ensure its continuity.

As Assistant Professor of Writing Hector Vila told us, we are all part of "Middlebury," not just Middlebury College. Whether it's the Monterey Institute, the lacrosse team or the summer language schools, the College's name has come to stand for far more than just a world-class undergraduate education. It has become a brand, and athletic success has played a significant part in setting Middlebury apart from its peers and establishing the value of that brand.

The athletics teams are instrumental in drumming up alumni support, engaging community members and drawing in prospective students. Of course this situation is not unique to Middlebury, but emblematic of the wider popularization of college sports nationwide. As sports fans, we struggle to balance our innate love for these games with the reality that, at their worst, unchecked athletic departments are undermining the foundational integrity of some of the country's most storied colleges and universities.

That is why we originally conceptualized this magazine: To look at our own athletic program through a more critical lens. From parties at Atwater to academic transparency, we must all be accountable for everything that we do, and not just on the field. From a journalistic point of view, that means doing a little digging to ensure that the foundations on which our success is built are solid.

In putting together this magazine, we are proud to say that most of what we have uncovered is undeniably positive. We have had eye-opening conversations with Middlebury athletes, met great people and gotten to look deeper at some of the figures and teams that make up our athletic program. As we sit here, we are confident that Middlebury athletes are positive representatives of the College in our community and beyond, but that does not mean that we should stop digging. With any luck, we never will.

BACK COVER PHOTO BY ANTHEA VON VIRAGH

PHOTO BY ANTHEA VON VIRAGH

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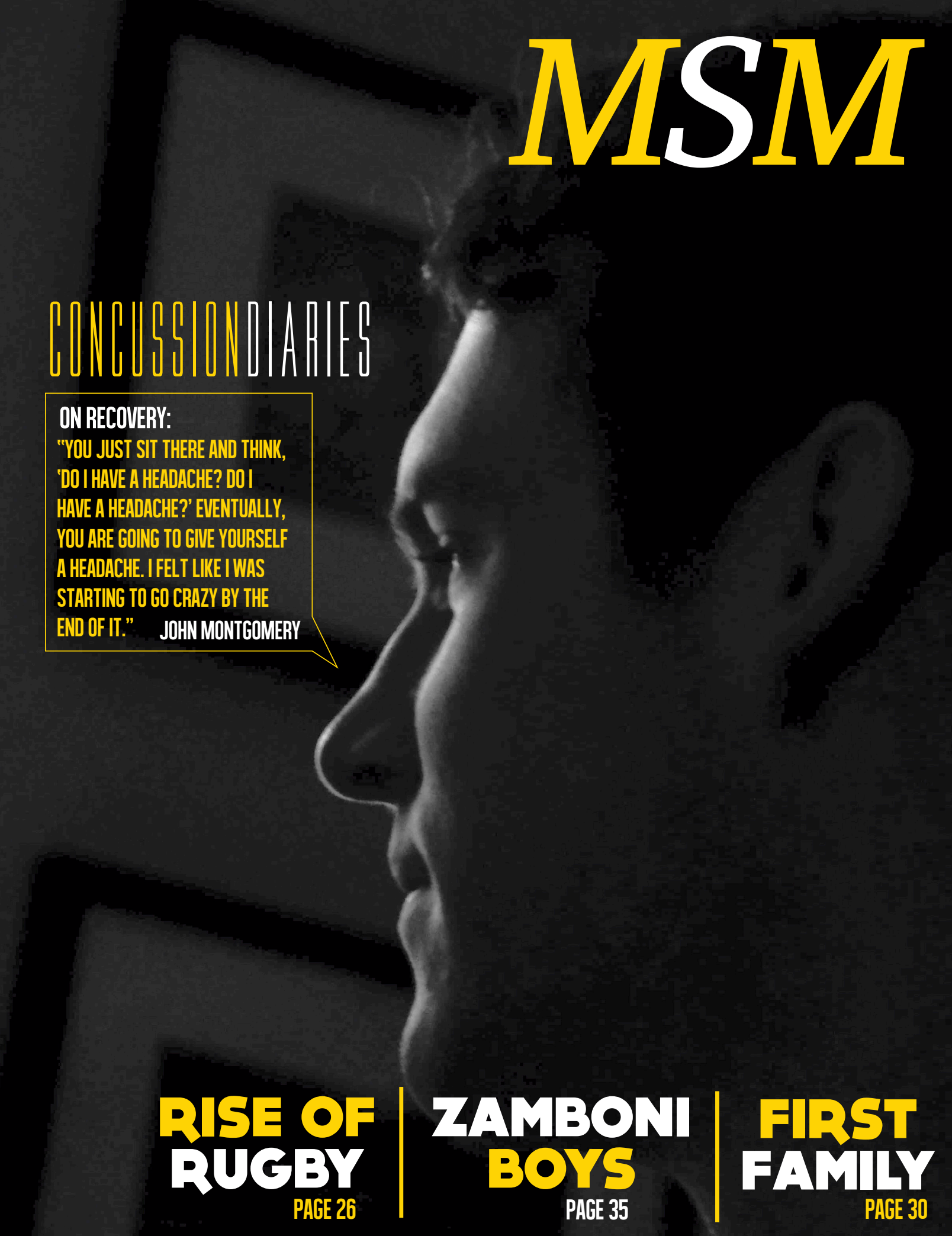

CONCUSSION DIARIES

ON RECOVERY:
"YOU JUST SIT THERE AND THINK, 'DO I HAVE A HEADACHE? DO I HAVE A HEADACHE?' EVENTUALLY, YOU ARE GOING TO GIVE YOURSELF A HEADACHE. I FELT LIKE I WAS STARTING TO GO CRAZY BY THE END OF IT." JOHN MONTGOMERY

RISE OF RUGBY PAGE 26

ZAMBONI BOYS PAGE 35

FIRST FAMILY PAGE 30